

**A Study of Factors Contributing to the
Success of Female Aboriginal Students in
an Inner City High School**

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by

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Abstract

This study was based on the premise that Aboriginal students possess valuable knowledge and insights with regard to factors leading to their educational success. This study was qualitative research using a narrative approach in the form of sharing circles. It was a study of factors five female Aboriginal high school students, who anticipated graduating in June 2002, identified as contributing to their success in school. Traditionally, researchers have focused on factors contributing to the failure of Aboriginal students in high school. Their analysis have proven futile in decolonizing and reconstructing conventional education.

The purpose of this study was to give students a voice in their education and in this voice, identify factors which contributed to their success. The data gathered through the collective voice of the students will assist educators and parents in challenging the educational system to satisfy the needs of all students, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. The unexpected composition of five female participants allowed the study to touch on issues facing Aboriginal women in school. These factors included the strong support of family, the nurturing roles that that engenders in them and their desire to bear children in the future, and the wish to break the cycle of social assistance by obtaining an education.

The information collected in the sharing circles was analyzed from a traditional medicine wheel framework. The themes and sub-themes, which developed from the data, created the elements of a medicine wheel which will bring balance and harmony to the educational system. The participants identified a strong inner support system characterized by goals and the search for a gift. The strength of their inner being fueled their will to succeed.

Their volition was further strengthened by factors found within the four realms of the medicine wheel: spiritual, emotional, physical, mental. The students identified

spirituality as a combination of Aboriginal and Catholic teachings. This was characteristic of a new social environment which taught a freedom to live within two ideals of spirituality. In the emotional realm the students identified family, friends and development of self-identity as factors contributing to their success. The physical realm outlined the role multiculturalism had in the school, support programs played in making success a reality, and drug and alcohol avoidance had in their ability to succeed. The participants described Aboriginal teacher support, an engaging curriculum, and a grade twelve diploma as factors leading to success in the mental realm. Overwhelmingly, the factor most effecting the educational success of the participants was the teacher. All of the students described the positive and negative effect teachers had on their education. The teacher who supported the students in the four realms of the medicine wheel encouraged success in the classroom. The teachers who did not support the students provided a roadblock to success which the students overcame with perseverance and determination.

The study suggests the need for future research in the area of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal success factors. Many factors identified within this study indicates a strong commonality between the needs of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in school. An examination of this type would serve to deconstruct the degree of difference assigned between students of different ethnic backgrounds. The data provided calls for more research on the relationships of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers within schools. Lastly, the data provided by the students strongly indicates administrators must work to prepare teachers to be more supportive to student needs.

This study provides some insights for educators, parents and administrators. Unfortunately the students, who are the most important part of the study, can only share their collective voice. The real work of transforming the educational system to meet the needs of Aboriginal students must come from educators, parents and administrators.

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A very special thanks to my friend and wife, Tracy, for her patient support, and assistance in completing my thesis.

Dedication

It is with gratitude and respect that I dedicate this thesis
to the Aboriginal high school students
who taught me so much in the short period of time our lives crossed paths,
to my wife
Tracy
and to my parents
Claire and Frank Bazylak.

I am forever indebted to them.

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Prologue

A man cannot write about the experiences of female oppression and capture an accurate account of the situation. It was not my intent to undertake such an impossible task in this thesis.

This study began as a study of Aboriginal male and female high school students success in school. The participants had to be graduating in June 2002 in order to participate in the study. I thought the ideal study group would include an equal number of male and female students. It was not a plan to have five female participants. In fact my initial response was one of disappointment at my failure to obtain an equal number of male and female participants. With no alternatives, I proceeded with the sharing circle involving five female participants. Rather than look at the study as a failure, I looked at it as an opportunity to examine specifically female Aboriginal high school student success.

The study proceeded in a different, but very important direction. The fact no male students were available for the study indicated the failure of the school system and Aboriginal gender issues in studying success. The success rates of male and female Aboriginal students differ at the high school level. This research is not an attempt to adopt “voice” for women. It is an attempt to provide a forum for female Aboriginal students to express their voice and experiences.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

A Traditional Grounding

In order to understand the world, the Creator gave us language and legends shared by elders. The stories shared by elders and storytellers provide perspective to all that happens on Mother Earth. In thinking of this thesis, I could not help but remember the stories of Weesageechak, the trickster. In the Plains Cree culture, Weesageechak is a mythical character who manipulates human beings and other characters causing chaos in their lives. Faced with Weesageechak's folly that ends in roadblocks, we are urged to find a way to return to a balanced and harmonious existence. Weesageechak attempts to trick us while playing the fool and then helps us to fix our lives. The lessons of Weesageechak provide a traditional opportunity to understand the plight of Aboriginal students in the educational system and to return to balance using the traditional teachings of the medicine wheel. In this thesis, Weesageechak has upset Aboriginal educational. Weesageechak's challenge to educators is to bring balance and harmony to Aboriginal education while remaining within the structures of the present day structure of education.

I believe it is possible to examine factors Aboriginal high school students identify as leading them to success in graduating from grade twelve, in the framework of the medicine wheel. The analysis will offer valuable information to schools that can work on to bringing Aboriginal education to a balanced state.

The traditional education system does not meet the needs of all students. The industrial age design of schools accommodates the learning needs of only a portion of the

students (Senge 2002). Educators and researchers (Battiste & Henderson 2000; Bowker 1993; Brady 1996; Freire 1970; Graveline 1998; Hoover 1998; Illich 1970; Ledlow 1992 MacKay & Myles 1995; McInerney, Hinkley, & Dowson 1997; Melnechenko & Horsman 1998; Senge 2002) have studied the traditional system with a desire to change its design for years. Unfortunately, the studies have produced little more than a facelift of the educational system. The fact remains that few Aboriginal students graduate with a grade twelve diploma. I believe a closer examination of Aboriginal students' success, not failure, will provide strategies for changing the educational system to meet the needs of more students, especially Aboriginal pupils.

The students at Joe Duquette High School, an Aboriginal urban high school, drive my desire to examine Aboriginal students' success. When I told people where I taught from 1993-1998, their reaction was often one of concern for my sanity, as they had heard it was a major challenge to teach "those" Aboriginal students. "Those" Aboriginal students was never said directly, but it was clear that was their meaning. The reality is that the students were respectful and most often a pleasure to teach. I developed many teacher /student relationships based on mutual respect. The level of trust and mutual understanding is one I have yet to experience in any other teaching assignment.

The Problem

Stereotyping, as seen with the Joe Duquette High School students, is only one roadblock on the path to success for Aboriginal high school students. Factors such as stereotyping, poverty, family mobility and racism can contribute to Aboriginal students dropping out of school. The problem of Aboriginal student failure in schools is not specific to one part of the world. In different corners of the world the same problem is evident in schools. The number of Aboriginal youth who are dropping out of high school is disproportionate to their non-Aboriginal peers. "Dropout rates among Canadian Native students attending mainstream secondary schools, like those of their American counterparts, are significantly higher than those of their non-Native peers" (Brady, 1996, p.10). Reid (2001) points out this phenomenon is not exclusive to Canadian schools. "Despite increased retention of Aboriginal students in Australian schools, the retention rate is still only 50 percent of that of non-Aboriginal students" (p.23). Closer to home, Saskatchewan's Aboriginal dropout rate has continually demonstrated the failure of the educational system in addressing the needs of Aboriginal students in high school. "The Aboriginal high school dropout rate in inner city schools in Saskatchewan was 90.5 per cent in 1981" (Saskatchewan Education, 1985, p.2). "More recently, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (1997) reported that in the Aboriginal community, 60% of the population 15 years of age and over have not completed high school" (Melnechenko & Horsman, 1998, pp. 2-3). The widespread problem of Aboriginal student failure in schools demands change in the educational systems at home and around the world.

It is time for educators to shift their focus from failure to success when examining Aboriginal students. Unfortunately, "after decades of research we know far more about factors that contribute to failure than about those that foster success" (Bempechat, 1998, p.xii). This study aims to uncover reasons for Aboriginal student success in high schools.

The need for more research into factors of success is evident. “The literature available on factors that contribute to Aboriginal student success at school in middle years is limited” (Melnechenko & Horsman, 1998, p.1). The lack of research fuels my desire to pursue the subject of factors contributing to the success of Aboriginal high school students.

Description of the Study

This study was qualitative research using a narrative approach in the form of a focus group, further identified as a sharing circle. The researcher chose a sharing circle format of focus groups in order to provide an appropriate cultural method of collecting data (Research Involving Aboriginal peoples, 2002). The research focused on factors Aboriginal high school students identified as contributing to their success in school. Specific criterion were used to choose the participants: Aboriginal ancestry, identified as ‘at risk’ by literature, and poised to graduate in June 2002.

Traditionally, researchers have focused only on factors contributing to the failure of Aboriginal students in high school (Battiste & Henderson 2000; Bowker 1993; Brady 1996; DuFour 2002; Freire 1970; Graveline 1998; Hoover 1998; Illich 1970; Ledlow 1992; MacKay & Myles 1995; McInerney, Hinkley, & Dowson 1997; Melnechenko & Horsman 1998; Senge 2002). This analysis has proven futile in decolonizing and reconstructing conventional education because the theory does not make it to practice. The researcher provided Aboriginal high school students with an opportunity to share their voice and perspectives, and in this voice, identify factors which contributed to their success. Their stories of success are the basis of the research. It is anticipated that their voices and experiences viewed through themes can offer educators insights which can begin to transform the educational system. The concept of voice is a dynamic one. As a metaphor, it symbolizes self-identity, hope, resilience, and self esteem in a person. To

Graveline (1998), "First Voice as a critical pedagogical tool arises out of anti-racist, feminist, experiential and Aboriginal discourse" (p.118). She describes its role in education. "First Voice as critical pedagogy challenges Eurocentric styles of curriculum development and targets the ingrained acceptance of the hegemonic voice speaking for us all" (p.120). Voice, for Graveline, is more than a word, it is a tool students can adopt to challenge and change the educational system. Leroy (2001), discussing Bogden and Biklen (1992) demonstrates the potential power a student's voice has for changing education. "Shannon was one of the children who was not only eager to share experiences, but also insisted that I write about them on her behalf so that other people 'can know my feelings' - particularly those people who may be in a position to offer support to girls like her" (p.84). It is time educators who are in a position to help Aboriginal students work to transform the educational system.

King, Walters, and Wells (2001) identify stories of success in the voices and experiences of first-, second- and third-generation urban Aboriginal people. Their stories of survival serve as inspiration for their children who fill our failing school systems. Cajete (1994) is another Aboriginal educator who identifies the importance of Aboriginal peoples' voices being heard in education:

It is time for Indian people to define Indian education in their own voices and in their own terms. It is time for Indian people to enable themselves to explore and express the richness of their collective history in education. Education for Indian people has been, and continues to be, a grand story, a search for meaning, an essential food for the soul. (p. 28)

Placed in this context, the complexity and value of student voice in educational change is evident and invaluable.

Cleary and Peacock (1998) discuss the importance of voice as a tool for encouraging success for Aboriginal students. "Students are also motivated when they feel the power in their own voices, the project tapped their inclination toward self-expression"

(p.211). The power for change comes from within. This idea is one Melnechenko and Horsman (1998) realize as they search the narratives of Aboriginal middle years students for success factors. The purpose of their study was “to determine factors that contribute to Aboriginal students’ success at school by listening to the voices of middle years students” (p.19). Melnechenko and Horsman’s study, although important, misses a major group consisting of Aboriginal high school students in an inner city high school. This study seeks to answer the question: What factors contribute to the success of Aboriginal high school students in an inner city high school?

Research Questions

Three major research questions frame this study.

1. What are the factors which foster success for Aboriginal high school students?
2. Why do researchers consistently focus on the factors causing failure of Aboriginal students in school?
3. How can factors contributing to the success of Aboriginal high school students assist educators in restructuring their environment to meet the needs of all students?

Supplementary Questions

The supplementary questions which served to guide the research are as follows:

1. How do parents and family assist students in becoming successful in school?
2. How can classroom teachers promote Aboriginal students’ success in high school?
3. What attributes create a positive school environment which promote Aboriginal student success in high school?
4. How do Aboriginal students define success?

Significance of the Study

This study is important for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers, administrators, parents, and students. The study of Aboriginal high school student success is a beginning to change education on a larger scale society. As Pelletier (1993), quoting Rumberger (1987), points out, “the unemployment rate for minority high school graduates is still higher than the unemployment rate for the general population” (p.13). The Canadian government, recognizing the need for such reform, made recommendations for improving the status of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. In The Report to the Ministers’ Committee on Multiculturalism by Saskatchewan Parks, Recreation and Culture (1989), 67 recommendations were made, among them was “that the Aboriginal community be encouraged to promote a positive image of its people by documenting and disseminating information on its successes and contributions to the development of Saskatchewan” (p.3) (Pelletier, 1993, p.13).

This research has several specific implications for the field of educational reform. First, the study adds to a very limited literature base examining Aboriginal high school students’ successes. Secondly, Aboriginal students are empowered through their ability to express their stories and experiences through their voice (Melnechenko & Horsman 1998; Pelletier 1993). This expression allows them to (a) share in the restructuring of Aboriginal education and (b) to experience a stronger and more successful educational experience. Thirdly, the research encourages educators to adjust their focus from factors contributing to Aboriginal students’ failure in high school to factors contributing to students’ success. This paradigm shift is one Pelletier (1993) supports:

Although the present graduation rate is unacceptably low, some students do manage to complete the requirements for grade 12. Drawing attention to these students and identifying the factors that enabled them to graduate can be a

positive contribution to both Indian and Metis, and Non-Native members of society. (p.14)

Finally, on a larger scale the study provides a beginning step for the transformation of education into an institution which attempts to meet the needs of all students.

The Setting

The research took place in an urban high school in Saskatchewan. The city in which the study was conducted has a population of just over 220, 000. In the Neighborhood Profiles of Aboriginal Population (1999) published by the Planning and Building Department- Community Planning Branch, the total Aboriginal population in the city was 7.5% in 1996. The planners utilized “statistics from Statistics Canada and the City, with other data obtained from secondary sources, such as the two Boards of Education” (p.2). Although the report was published in February 1999, from data gathered in 1996, the Aboriginal population has increased over the last six years. The percentage is currently estimated at 10% of the city’s overall population and up to 25% in the area surrounding the high school where the study was conducted.

The research was conducted at an urban Catholic high school with population of approximately 1,225 students in the 2001-2003 school year. The Aboriginal population in the area supplying students to the high school is 13.5%. This is nearly double the Aboriginal percentage in the city as a whole. The study has special importance for the specific high school. The school is located in a low to middle income area of the city. It has a high multicultural population which includes Asian, Hispanic, Indian, Anglo-Saxon, and a growing number of Aboriginal students. Students have the option of identifying their ethnic background, so there are no accurate records of ethnic populations. The school administration approximates 35% of the students to be First Nation or Metis. With a population this diverse, courses such as Cree, Native Studies, Ukrainian, and Spanish

are offered to the students at the school.

As a Catholic school, the teachers commit to living by Roman Catholic morals and values. Christian Ethics is a course all students must take in order to attend the school. The Christina Ethics curriculum is locally developed and is a mandatory course for all students during each of their high school years. The curriculum focuses on identity, morality and societal concerns within a Catholic context. There are many other programs within the school. These include: Special Needs for Functionally Integrated Students, Learning Assistance, Modified Education, Alternate Education, English as a Second Language, and an Extension Program for students with behavioral challenges.

Background of the Researcher

I grew up on perogies, cabbage rolls and bannock. My mother is Claire Bazylak (Vermette) and my father is Frank Bazylak. They grew up in a small French/Metis community in Saskatchewan. My mother's family grew up as a hardworking farming Metis family. I have many uncles, aunts, and cousins who comprise my extended family. My grandfather came to Canada from Poland and attempted farming. With limited success, my father's family lived a very poor and hard life. From my mother I developed a love of children and from my father I developed a very strong work ethic and a will to never quit.

I am a proud Polish/Metis educator. I have taught for nine and a half years. For my internship I requested a middle years school which was dedicated to students who were behaviorally challenged. I chose the school because I felt I could learn the most from these students who did not fit into the conventional educational system. This teaching assignment led me to several other schools or specialized programs for students who were not successful in school. One of my placements was at an inner city Aboriginal high

school. I taught there for six years and in this time began to understand more fully one part of my heritage. Also during this time, I realized how our school system fails to meet the needs of Aboriginal students, both Metis and First Nation. This realization has driven my desire to participate in the sharing circles and to further study Aboriginal students' success in my thesis.

Researcher in Relation to the Study

My experience in education has contributed to this qualitative study. The concept of success has always been an interesting one to me as an educator and I feel it is an important concept to study. Bempechat (1998) describes the need to study success in schools. "Our anxieties over school failure should be driving our efforts to understand success" (p.5). I agree with Bempechat that "as the population of students becomes increasingly ethnic, we have an obligation as educational researchers to understand how academic achievement is influenced by culture and ethnicity" (p.5). Until my experiences at an urban Aboriginal high school, I defined success in a Eurocentric fashion driven by grades and competition. My definition of success has since changed. I realized success could mean a student who was off the street and attending school, but not passing courses at that time. My concept of success developed into a broader concept past what I had learned in my Eurocentric upbringing.

My interest in success led me to focus on factors Aboriginal high school students identified as contributing to their success in school. The purpose of this research is to allow Aboriginal students to express their stories and experiences through their voice. Their voices will lead them out of their educational oppression. The expression of their voice allows the development of their identity. As Noel (1994) points out, "the rediscovery of identity necessarily sets the conditions for the acquisition of autonomy and

power” (p.191). The students’ expression of voice allowed them to further to develop their inner strength while challenging educational oppression.

Researcher Assumptions

The researcher is aware of certain assumptions underlying this study which are as follows:

1. The participants are providing the answers to the questions in an honest manner.
2. The students will pass all second semester classes and graduate in June 2002.

Delimitations

1. This study was delimited to one urban high school in a large urban center in Saskatchewan.
2. The study took place March and April of 2002.
3. The methodology used was qualitative and did not include quantitative methods.
4. This study was delimited to five female Aboriginal high school students in grade twelve students.
5. The students represented ages seventeen, eighteen and twenty-two.

Limitations

1. This study was limited to five female Aboriginal students, thereby limiting the generalizability of its findings.
2. Recognizing and respecting the diversity of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, the study was limited to students of Cree First Nations and Metis origins.

3. Due to the time constraints with regard to completion of this research study, the researcher acknowledges that it did not cover fully the factors contributing to Aboriginal high school student success.

4. The researcher is an Aboriginal male interpreting data provided by female participants.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms were defined.

Aboriginal. “The term aboriginal peoples refers collectively to status Indian, non-status Indian, Metis, and Inuit people in Canada” (Wotherspoon & Satzewich, 2000, p.xv).

at risk. “An [at risk student is] any child or youth who, due to disabling, cultural, economic, or medical conditions, is (a) denied or has minimum equal opportunities and resources in a variety of settings and (b) is in jeopardy of failing to become a successful and meaningful member of his or her community (home, school, and business)” (Welch & Sheridan (1995) p. 31).

community. “Any group living in the same area or having interests, work, etc. in common” (Webster’s New World Dictionary 1995, p. 79).

culture. “Kahn (1991) defines culture broadly as ‘the environment in which things grow....A person’s environment determines much of what she is able or not to do, to feel, to think (P.325). Culture is both subject to the influences of domination and a tool of resistance” (Graveline, 1998, pp.21-22).

decolonization. Decolonization is “critical theory in the act of exposing underlying assumptions that serve to conceal the power relations that exist within society and the ways in which dominant groups construct concepts of ‘common sense’ and ‘facts’ to

provide ad hoc justification for the maintenance of inequalities and oppression” (Smith, 2000, p.228).

emancipation. “To emancipate themselves from the oppression to which they have often been subjected for centuries, individuals and groups have to escape their places of confinement and take their turn at occupying the field of universal” (Noel, 1994, p.145). “There are three fundamental realms that must be conquered by anyone aspiring to emancipation, often after centuries of subjugation: identity, autonomy and power” (p.191).

endogenous education. “Much of Indigenous education can be called “endogenous” education; it revolves around a transformational process of learning by bringing forth illumination from one’s ego center” (Cajete, 1994, P.208).

Eurocentrism. “Eurocentrism is the imaginative and institutional context that informs contemporary scholarship, opinion, and law. As a theory, it postulates the superiority of Europeans over non-Europeans” (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 21).

First Nation. First Nations refers to groups of status Indian origin: groups who were the first occupants of the lands that now make up Canada (Wotherspoon & Satzewich, 2000, p.xv).

focus group. Blesse (1997) adopts Morgan and Spanish’s (1984) definition of a focus group as “a qualitative method for gathering data in which several participants are brought together to discuss a topic of mutual interest to themselves and the researcher”(p. 15).

Metis. The Metis Society of Saskatchewan defines a Metis as a person of aboriginal ancestry who:

- 1) can provide proof of his/her ancestry;
- 2) declares him/herself to be a Metis; and

- 3) meets one of the following tests:
- a) is accepted as a Metis by the Metis community,
 - b) has traditionally held himself/herself out to be a Metis,
 - c) has been recognized by the community-at-large as a Metis (Wotherspoon & Satzewich, 2000, p.xv).

Native. The term Native refers to Aboriginal. See Aboriginal for a definition.

non-Aboriginal. This term is used in the general sense to refer to those people who are not self-declared as being of Aboriginal ancestry.

othering. This term was coined by Gayatri Spivak for the process by which imperial discourse creates its 'others'. Othering describes the various ways in which colonial discourse produces its subjects (Ashcroft, Griffith, & Tiffin, 1998, p. 171).

success. Success in this study is simply defined as graduation from high school.

voice. "Voice is critical pedagogy [which] challenges Eurocentric styles of curriculum development and targets the ingrained acceptance of the hegemonic voice speaking for us all" (Graveline, 1998, p.120).

worldview. "Collective consciousness can also be expressed as worldview. 'A worldview is a set of images and assumptions about the world....Since a worldview is knowledge about the world, what we are talking about here is epistemology, the theory of knowledge (Kearney, 1984, p.10)'" (Graveline, 1998, p.19).

Summary

The description of the study and the research questions outline the purpose for the examination of Aboriginal students' success in high school. Background information on the researcher and an expanded explanation of the researcher in relation to the study has been provided. An extensive definition of terms assists in the comprehension of the concepts discussed in the remainder of the study. The qualitative nature of the study has been provided and the research methodology will be explored further in the review of literature in Chapter Three.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter One provides the background to the research study, including a description of the study, research questions, the researcher's background and relationship to the study, assumptions, delimitations, limitations, and a definition of terms. Chapter Two provides a review of the relevant literature around family, friends, and teachers and their effect on student success. The third chapter presents a literature review of the research methodology of focus groups and the research process as it was carried out in the study. The fourth chapter provides the analysis of the research data. The data is presented in the framework of a medicine wheel. Chapter Five provides my interpretation of the data, with reference to the research literature, conclusions regarding factors contributing to Aboriginal high school students' success in school, and the implications for further research which can be drawn from the results of this research study.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This literature review begins with a brief examination of education as it was used as a tool for colonization with specific reference to the historical development of the at risk label provided to many Aboriginal youth. Then, a brief comparison of Aboriginal and Eurocentric worldviews is presented as a base to understanding how their different beliefs affect education. Next, an overview of pertinent literature deconstructing conventional education is presented. Finally, academic literature which supports an examination of success is outlined.

Historical Background

In order to understand fully where Aboriginal education is today, it is important to consider the context and events that have both contributed to the negative reactions of Aboriginal people to European education and to the pursued changes in the educational system. Examining the history of Indian and Metis and European education allows researchers to better understand the performance, positive or negative, of Aboriginal students in high school. Following Pelletier (1993), the best way to trace the past is in dividing it into eras. In doing so, it becomes possible to examine briefly the path Aboriginal education has taken from before European contact to the present day.

Before the colonization of North America, there were two educational histories: European and Aboriginal education. A look at the historical background of Aboriginal education must include an examination of the development of European education prior to

colonization. An examination of the history of European education is valuable as it provides a general understanding of how some of the misguided and cruel educational techniques used on Aboriginal youth developed. The eras of discussion are divided into the following: the development of European education, prior to colonization, traditional Aboriginal education, prior to invasion, the missionary period (1615-1870), the day school period (1860-1890), the residential/industrial school period (1880-1970) and Indian and Metis education today (1960-present).

The Development of European Education

The present educational system does not work for many students, including Aboriginal students. Tracing the bizarre development of European education presents a picture of a cold and one dimensional institution designed to satisfy a majority while ignoring the needs of the minority.

Schools developed during the Industrial age. They emerged from the context of labor organization. Scientists, such as Kepler, Descartes, and Newton, contributed further to the positivistic mechanism. "It became natural to conceive the world as made up of discrete components, which fit together like the parts in a machine. This offered the beguiling implication that ultimately the universe could be understood completely" (Senge, 2000, p. 4). The idea was to analyze the parts so the world could be predicted and controlled.

The theory of the scientists led Frederick the Great, the eighteenth-century Prussian ruler, to use standardized, uniformity, and drill training in order to achieve military success (p.5). The industrialists of the nineteenth century adopted techniques of organization, utilized by Frederick the Great, such as "chain of command" and "line", to organize manufacturer lines. As a result, "the assembly line produced an unparalleled

number of uniform manufactured objects more rapidly than ever before. From 1770 to 1812, labor productivity increased 120 times over in the British textile industry” (p.5). The success of factories organized in such a manner was not lost to mid-nineteenth century educators. They built schools in the successful model of the factories. “The result was an industrial-age school system fashioned in the image of the assembly line, the icon of the booming industrial age” (p.5). The system produced success in school, but also created many of the problems educators deal with in school today. “It operationally defined smart kids and dumb kids. Those who did not learn at the speed of the assembly line either fell off or were forced to struggle continually to keep pace; they were labeled ‘slow’ or, in today’s more fashionable jargon, ‘learning disabled’” (p.6). Many Aboriginal students today are further labeled as ‘at risk’. An important note is that these terms were not created for Aboriginal students; Aboriginal youth were placed into the existing labels. Any student who did not fit the factory model of education was taken off the fast track of the assembly line to be refashioned or corrected before being sent back on the line. For those who could not fit the model, they were doomed to failure.

Traditional Aboriginal Education

Prior to European colonization (1600), Aboriginal peoples engaged in a manner of teaching which suited their needs. Before the Eurocentric values associated with education were placed upon Aboriginal people, tribal education had specific techniques for teaching the young the necessary skills, knowledge, and wisdom to guide them in adulthood.

Traditional Tribal education revolved around experiential learning (learning by doing or seeing), storytelling (learning by listening and imagining), ritual/ceremony (learning through imitation), dreaming (learning through unconscious imagery), tutoring (learning through apprenticeship), and artistic creation (learning through creative synthesis) (Cajete, 1994, p.34). It is interesting to note that some of the teaching techniques similar to Eurocentric

educational structures or techniques. There are, however, critical differences between the

European and traditional Aboriginal education. Pelletier (1993) points out “education amongst North America’s Aboriginal peoples did not fragment knowledge” as is seen in the European culture. “From an early age children learned about their environment through observation, discussion, and role playing” (p.4). The storytelling and discussion served to teach children about their history.

Traditional education did not end at the age of seventeen, but continued into adulthood with the teachings shared by elders in the community. Traditional tribal education, so many years ago, satisfied the goal of lifelong learning many educators and researchers thrive to accomplish in education today. “The goal of education should be to develop independent life long learners” (Barth, 2002). Tribal education offered an effective manner for creating productive individuals who contributed positively to the community. This was a successful manner of teaching.

The Missionary Period (1615-1870)

With a clearer understanding of the differences of European and Aboriginal education, it is not hard to understand how the missionaries began what would be a long and continuing journey of Aboriginal education forced into the bizarre mold of European education.

The explorers “discovered” new territory with a new type of people. It was not long after that the missionaries came to spread Christianity. “While the major European powers set out to colonize North America, spreading Christianity was an important aspect of the colonization process” (Pelletier, 1993, p.5). The goals of the missionaries were to save their souls and teach them European customs and language. “Missions were often established in conjunction with the fur trade posts and the missionary schools provided Indian and Metis peoples with the basic skills thought necessary to Christianize and to

facilitate the economy of the fur trade” (P. 6). This was a critical step in what was to become a very cruel and damaging era for Aboriginal education.

The Day School Period (1860-1890)

The Day School Period was marked by the passing of the British North America Act. The federal government assumed responsibility for Aboriginal education. Education was a treaty responsibility of the federal government. “The first Nations treaties with the imperial Crown created an educational right in the Aboriginal families and a corresponding duty or obligation on the Crown to finance educational facilities and opportunities” (Henderson, 1995, p.245). Day Schools, run by the church members, were the government’s answer to treaty commitments to provide an education for Aboriginal people. For the most part, the schools were marked by failure. “Problems of attendance, underfunding, inadequate facilities and supplies, and underqualified teachers resulted in general failure” (Pelletier, 1993, p. 6). The schools were also not accomplishing the goal of Aboriginal assimilation.

The federal government, knowing the Day School model was not working, studied industrial schools in the United States as a viable option for Aboriginal education. Pelletier (1993), quoting Sealey (1980), observed that the researchers were quick to realize “that the building of industrial boarding schools in the United States hastened the assimilative process and that day schools were not successful because the ‘influence of the wigwam was stronger than the influence of the school’” (p.7). The educational philosophy which led to the creation of residential schools was another critical step in the destruction of a Aboriginal people which leaves its mark to this day.

The Residential/Industrial School Period (1880-1970)

The examination of the industrial boarding schools of the United States led to the

establishment of residential or industrial schools throughout Canada. The creation of residential schools allowed the government to attain their goal of genocide for Aboriginal people through colonization. "Colonization works the same way everywhere, its policies geared toward displacement and elimination of indigenous culture: genocide. The residential school, wherever it has appeared, has been part of that policy" (Haig-Brown, 1988, p.11). Many survivors of the residential school experience have told their stories in an attempt to heal and educate. Pelletier (1993), quoting Armstrong (1989), described the effects of residential schools, past and present:

'Aboriginal children were seized from their homes and forcibly placed in sterile, military-like, hostile institutions called residential schools. These places of horror were invariably run by people who, themselves, never had children, and whose only goal was what they called to 'civilize.' This process took place during the child's most essential stages of development. The resultant breakdown in our communities, emerged, from helpless parents left with nothing to live for and children raised in racist hostility and dispassion.

The ensuing nightmare of the effect of that, on our communities has been, what those 'Indian problem' statistics are all about. It has been the single most devastating factor at the core of the damage, beyond all the other mechanisms cleverly fashioned to subjugate, assimilate and terminate'. (p. 8)

During the residential school period, educators across Canada attempted full assimilation by punishing Aboriginal youth for speaking their mother tongue. Battiste (1986), discussing the Shubenacadie residential schools in Nova Scotia (Micmac News, 1978), describes the steps taken to accomplish assimilation through language deprivation. "Micmac youths were forcibly taken to the boarding schools and, through strict discipline, corporal punishment, and rigid rules, were required to use only English in and out of school" (p.37). The loss of language and breakdown of family groups led to the present Aboriginal education picture seen today.

Aboriginal Education Today (1960-present)

Aboriginal education began to change in the 1970's:

The growing population of Indian, Metis and non Status Indians in urban areas within Saskatchewan altered educational policy in Saskatchewan significantly in the 1970's, for it brought attention to the social, economic, and political conditions facing Aboriginal people. (St. Denis, Bouvier, & Battiste, 1998, p.68)

The Aboriginal communities assumed control over the administration of First Nations schools. Curriculum and texts remained outside the control of Aboriginal people. In the Indian Control of Indian Education (1972) policy, attempts were made to train and hire more Aboriginal teachers to meet the needs of Aboriginal students. In 1978, the Svenson Report "reinforced the need to pay attention to the issues raised by leaders of both First nations and Metis organizations, as they predicted that the Aboriginal student population in Saskatchewan would be 50 percent of the overall population by 2001" (St. Denis, Bouvier, & Battiste, 1998, p.69). Aboriginal Teacher Education Programs (TEP's) were created in order to train Aboriginal people to enter the teaching profession.

In 1980 a community schools initiative was launched by the government which targeted students at risk in the inner city. "Its premise was preventative, providing holistic responses to education issues related to urban poverty" (St. Denis, Bouvier, & Battiste, 1998, p.71). Another review conducted by Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission in 1985 "lead to the development of the Education Equity Plan. The findings of this review highlighted the crisis of and challenge presented by the education of Aboriginal people" (St. Denis, Bouvier, & Battiste, 1998, p.72).

Today the number of Aboriginal youth within schools across Saskatchewan in increasing. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Report (1996) maintains 68% of Aboriginal youth across Canada attend provincial schools. Even with the staggering amount of Aboriginal student representation in schools, "there are only a few Aboriginal

people in positions of added responsibility as superintendents, principals or vice-principals” (St. Denis, Bouvier, & Battiste, 1998, p.73). The Joint School Agreement between federal and provincial governments has not changed the situation for Aboriginal youth. “The problems that the Indian children immediately encountered in the integrated schools were much the same as the ones being faced today: lack of cultural and linguistic relevancy in the curriculum, over representation of Indian and Metis students in special education and vocational programs, age-grade deceleration, and high dropout rates” (Pelletier, 1993). The problems of yesterday have masked themselves into different problems for Aboriginal students in school. Although the blatant racism rarely occurs in schools, overt racism, often a more damaging phenomenon, is alive and well in education.

Educators must know where they have been in order to know where to go. The history of Aboriginal education, as presented by Aboriginal people, describes a cruelty one would think no longer possible in education. Unfortunately, Aboriginal youth are struggling to survive in schools in 2002. A key issue at hand is educators understanding of the differences between Aboriginal and Eurocentric worldviews.

Aboriginal and Eurocentric Worldviews

*"I never let school get in the way of my learning."
Mark Twain*

The history of Aboriginal and European education began as separate paths to learning with some similarities, but after colonization, there became one dominant educational model, the European educational model. Senge (2002), following Twain's philosophy on true 'learning' as opposed to empty "schooling", highlights the difference between European education and other forms of worldly education:

The industrial model of schools didn't just change how students learned; it also changed what was taught. Other countries had their own local, indigenous texts—both written and oral. They learned about weather and climate, but not for the sake of altering or controlling the seasons. They learned about the world to understand and fit into it, not to command or control it. (p. 6)

Senge's (2002) comparison directly relates to Aboriginal education when compared to European education. A comparison of this type is necessary as, although the European model of education is dominant, the Aboriginal model is still alive in communities.

In comparing "schooling" and "learning", Twain offers a valuable metaphor to compare Aboriginal and European education. In order to discuss education of the two groups, it is necessary to compare Aboriginal and European worldviews and their roles in the formation of educational practices. European worldview places value on "schooling" while Aboriginal worldview values "learning." Several researchers (Cajete 1994; McInerney et al. 1997; Triandis 1995) outline distinct differences between Aboriginal and European worldviews and their effect on education.

Cajete (1994) describes Aboriginal worldview in relation to education. It is important to understand the depth of heterogeneity among Aboriginal peoples. There are 495 communities across Canada, 11 language families comprised of 70 or so languages (Brizinski, 1989). Cajete (1994) speaks to the commonalities among the tribes.

An examination of Tribal foundations of American Indian education allows

educators to understand how education was taught and learned in an Aboriginal arena. “These foundations teach us that learning is a subjective experience tied to a place environmentally, socially, and spiritually” (p. 33). An Aboriginal worldview of education places a great importance on family. “The living place, the learner’s extended family, the clan and tribe provided the context and source for teaching” (p.33). In Aboriginal worldview, “the ideal purpose of education is to attain knowledge, seek truth, wisdom, completeness, and life as perceived by traditional philosophies and cultures around the world” (p.34). Cajete’s (1994) description of Aboriginal worldview is in stark contrast to the European worldview.

McInerney et al. (1997), citing Triandis (1995), offers a valuable comparison of Aboriginal and European worldviews in a discussion of Western society’s value on individualism as opposed to Australian Aboriginal value on collectivism in schools. These researchers hold that achievement is influenced by individualism and collectivism. In comparing Western societies and non-Western societies, such as the Australian Aboriginal children, a number of opposing values are recognized which result in different levels of educational success. “Individuals within Western societies are competitive, seek power and control over others and desire individual success through achieving personal goals. In contrast, it is believed that Aboriginal children are affiliation-oriented and are motivated by cooperation and social concern” (p.4). The phenomenon McInerney et al. (1997) discusses is not unique to Australia; it is also prevalent in relation to North American Aboriginal people.

Little Bear (2000) offers a unique discussion when comparing Aboriginal and Eurocentric worldviews:

Colonization has left a heritage of jagged worldviews among Indigenous peoples. They no longer had an Aboriginal worldview, nor did they adopt a Eurocentric worldview. Their consciousness became a random puzzle, a

jigsaw puzzle that each person has to attempt to understand. (p.84)

Little Bear describes the situation in which educators and students must negotiate in an attempt to create a successful environment in schools. The jigsaw worldview theory compounds the confusion surrounding Aboriginal education.

Overview of Related Research

The historical development of Aboriginal and European education helps educators to understand how the present educational system developed into a dominant European model. In discussing the Aboriginal and European worldviews in the context of education, educators are able to understand at a deeper level the two forces at work in our present day educational system.

In order to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the educational system, it is necessary to first deconstruct conventional education and also identify success factors in Aboriginal education.

Deconstructing Education

Conventional education does not meet the needs of all students, whether Aboriginal or not. This is not to say the educational system is a complete failure, but educators must realize there are a large number of students who do not find success in the present setting. DuFour (2002), in a discussion of conventional education, identifies the hypocrisy of school mission statements which state in one way or another “to create an environment where all can learn.” The reality, according to DuFour (2002), is that schools meet the needs of appropriately seventy-five percent of their population. He echoes the thoughts of many when asking, “What about the other twenty-five percent?” The setting must be challenged, changed and improved. A change of this sort can only

come about if there is a clear understanding of the weaknesses in the educational system.

Researchers, past and present, discuss the general failure of the present educational system (Battiste & Henderson 2000; Bowker 1993; Brady 1996; DuFour 2002; Freire 1970; Graveline 1998; Hoover 1998; Illich 1970; Ledlow 1992 MacKay & Myles 1995; McInerney et al. 1997; Melnechenko & Horsman 1998; Senge 2002). These educators offer valuable critiques as they deconstruct traditional education. The researchers, through their criticisms, call for the development of alternative approaches to education and teaching. They argue for adaptations in the system, but very few changes have been made in recent years to accommodate at risk students, specifically Aboriginal high school students in Saskatoon inner city high schools.

Freire (1970) is a well known critic of conventional education. He introduces educators and students to the concept of critical consciousness, “conscientizacao”, in Pedagogy of the Oppressed. In his discussion of education, Freire critiques traditional education’s teaching as a method of ‘banking’:

Narration (with the teacher as narrator) leads the students to memorize mechanically the narrated content. Worse yet, it turns them [students] into ‘containers,’ into ‘receptacles’ to be ‘filled’ by the teacher. Education thus becomes an act of depositing... Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the ‘banking’ concept of education. (p. 58)

Teachers expect students to fill their minds with the knowledge traditional curriculum provides. Students cannot ask questions outside the realm of the curriculum, and as a result there is no discussion or search for relevant knowledge. In fact, many students face academic discipline if they are not successful in the ‘banking’ method of learning. They are channeled toward remedial or alternative programming.

In this educational setting, many Aboriginal high school students do not succeed. When the ‘banking’ method of learning does not fulfill their educational needs, they are

seen as deviants or intellectually inferior (Freire 1970; Illich 1970). Knowledge in this sense is a gift from the teacher who sits in a position of authority. There is no genuine sharing between the teacher and student to facilitate authentic learning. Freire's criticism of traditional curricula is one taken up by other theorists.

Illich (1970), another critic of traditional education, has been an advocate for at risk students, the poor in particular. Since poverty is one characteristic of at risk students, his criticisms have direct relevance in this study. Illich believes "the pupil is 'schooled' to confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something" (p. 1). He calls for society to disestablish schools because the institutions, with their grading system, create social and economic rank in society. Illich criticizes many aspects of education, but his examination of curricula is of direct relevance to this study. When writing about curricula, Illich maintains that "school is inefficient in skill instruction especially because it is circular. In most schools a program which is meant to improve one skill is chained always to another irrelevant task" (p.17). An example of an irrelevant task is the use of class attendance as a right to play on the playground. A better example may be the popular holistic approach for teaching which attempts to bring together as many curricula as possible into one lesson, even if it means sacrificing authentic learning in the process.

The conventional educational system produces students who cannot think for themselves. "Rich and poor alike depend on schools...which guide their lives, from their world view, and define for them what is legitimate and what is not" (p.2). Modern curricula forces students to accept what others declare as important to learn. As a result, Aboriginal students are left with a sense of inadequacy and the feeling their knowledge base is irrelevant in the world. Illich continues his criticism of conventional education. "Roles are assigned by setting a curriculum of conditions which the candidate must meet if

he is to make the grade” (p.11). Students learn material others deem important and are ranked according to their ability to regurgitate the information. Aboriginal students struggle to regurgitate at the rate of “normal” students and as a result are often placed in remedial programs and deemed failures in the system. This failure finds the students in remedial courses in a higher percentage than their non-Aboriginal peers (Brady 1996; Dingman, Mroczka, and Brady 1995; McInerney et al. 1997 ; Melnechenko & Horsman 1998; Myles & Mackay 1989).

Graveline (1998) analyses education from an Aboriginal perspective and argues that conventional education does not meet the needs of Aboriginal students in university. Graveline asks educators to resist the tenants of the dominating Western educational system. In doing so, she identifies one of the main weaknesses of the Eurocentric system of education:

The Eurocentric colonial world view has highly influenced what is considered ‘theory’ in today’s educational settings. Many who are acculturated to the dominant world view assume that theirs is the most accurate and presumably adaptive world view in the history of humanity. But Eurocentrism is at best an approximation of reality rather than an accurate image of it. (p.31)

The Eurocentric world view describes European knowledge as pure and unchallengeable not only in education but in society as a whole. In Canada’s multicultural setting, European knowledge does not address the needs of all students.

Dyck (1998) addresses Eurocentric worldview when critiquing traditional Western science in favour of a more well rounded ideal of Aboriginal science. “Scientific knowledge is not value-free but a product limited by and tainted with the values of the culture that produces it” (p.89). Aboriginal science includes a spiritual dimension no other ways of doing science advocate. The dominant Eurocentric worldview Dyck speaks of is responsible for creating curricula which are comprised of irrelevant knowledge students are expected to apply to their lives. The dominator dictates the curricula, while the

dominated accept it as true knowledge. Francis (1992) emphasizes how easily falsehoods can be accepted as true knowledge in his analysis of how Eurocentrism, from Columbus to present, is responsible for creating a false image of the Indian. "Indians, as we think we know then, do not exist. In fact, there may well be no such thing as an Indian. The Indian is the invention of the European" (p.4). Francis challenges this falsehood and reveals the marketing motive for the imaginary Indian. "This is a book about the images of Native people that White Canadians manufactured, believed in, feared, despised, admired, taught their children. It is about White -and not Native-cultural history" (p.5). Non-Aboriginal people are indoctrinated to believe in the image of the Indian because it provided an understanding of the Aboriginal peoples. In Eurocentric thought, if something cannot be understood, it is feared. By redefining what is feared, it no longer poses a threat.

Henderson (2002) characterizes Eurocentrism as the "anti-trickster", opposite the trickster in Aboriginal storytelling, which "appears in many guises and is the essence of paradoxical transformation (p.58). Eurocentrism cannot be erased from schools. In fact, Eurocentrism is implanted deep in the foundation of education. Henderson expands on the far reaching effects Eurocentrism has in schools and other scholarship:

It has been the dominant artificial context for the last five centuries and is an integral part of all scholarship, opinion, and law. As an institutional and imaginative context, it includes a set of assumptions and beliefs about empirical reality. (p.58)

Many factors contribute to Aboriginal students' failure in school. These factors are not always easy to identify. "Although there was often consensus among stakeholders on key contributory factors in Native student dropouts, the salient factors were almost invariably intertwined with other factors" (MacKay & Myles, 1995, p.163). Nonetheless, educators identify three key factors of Aboriginal student failure as lack of cultural content in schools, lack of parental involvement, and low teacher expectations.

A lack of Aboriginal cultural content in the classroom is identified as a factor contributing to the failure of students in school. Educators refer to the controversial phenomenon as the 'cultural discontinuity hypothesis.' The hypothesis states that:

culturally based differences in the communication styles of the minority students' home and the Anglo culture of the school leads to conflicts, misunderstandings, and ultimately, failure for those students. The research focuses on the process rather than the structure of education and concludes that making the classroom culturally appropriate will mean a higher rate of achievement. (Ledlow, 1992, p.23)

The cultural discontinuity hypothesis is considered controversial because while there are educators (Hoover 1998) who support the push for cultural curriculum in the classroom, there are also those who suggest it is a band-aid approach in assisting Aboriginal students in high school (Ledlow, 1992).

For example, some research data have shown a lack of culturally relevant curriculum precipitates failure for Aboriginal students. "Research has shown that the constant neglect of culture blended with educational curriculum negatively affects students and how they view themselves as learners within the larger society" (Hoover, 1998, p.28). Influenced by this research, many Aboriginal people believe changing the curriculum will solve the problems for some Aboriginal students. "Navajo community members, teachers and students believe that more Navajo history, culture and language courses should be included into the curriculum to enhance the education of the students" (McInerney et al., 1997, p.12).

Educators continue to believe the 'cultural discontinuity hypothesis' although holding that it plays a smaller role as a factor causing failure in schools:

...this hypothesis is now accepted as fact by many researchers and has become an underlying assumption rather than a research question in Indian Education. I argue that the unquestioning acceptance of the cultural discontinuity hypothesis by many educators, as a cause for dropping out of school, is misguided. (Ledlow, 1992, p. 24)

Ledlow's position is that "while in previous research, issues of cultural differences

between Navajo and Western values towards formal education have been the focus, the present investigation shows that compatibility on many fundamental educational issues actually exists” (McInerney et al., 1997, p.14). While educators continue to debate the cultural discontinuity hypothesis, Aboriginal students in high schools, where no or minimal Aboriginal content exists, are failing in the classroom.

Lack of parental involvement is another factor thought to be contributing to Aboriginal students’ failure in high school. “Non-Native educators were either uncertain or thought that parents of dropouts lacked interest in their children’s education and failed to engender in them an appreciation of its value” (MacKay & Myles, 1995, p.166). The educators’ impressions regarding Aboriginal child rearing exposes a cultural value or perception. Rather than suggesting that parents are uninterested in their child’s education, the researchers did not factor in the cultural values surrounding this seeming uninterest. Harp (1998) summarizes the residential school history behind the ‘disinterested parent’:

The changes and breakdown of the First Nation families began with the colonization and the assimilation policies of the federal government, which were legalized through the Indian Act of 1876. The First Nations family was fractured and weakened. The residential school era consisted of removing children from parental control, which proved devastating to the First Nations family system. (p.67)

It is evident the lack of family involvement in formal schooling is connected to larger social problems, which further compound the potential for student failure in school.

“Both Native and non-Native educators recognized that certain Native dropouts lacked parental support because of the many social problems that affected their families” (MacKay & Myles, 1995, p.166). The researchers warn that, similar to the cultural discontinuity hypothesis, parental involvement cannot be treated as the only factor causing failure in school:

Many educators used the presence or absence of parental support to explain a student’s decision to remain at or drop out of school. ‘In homes where graduation and education is stressed and valued by parents, kids graduate;

otherwise they rarely do.' Such an apparently cogent explanation can enormously comfort educators because it places responsibility for a student's behaviour firmly with the parents and releases the school system from both blame and remedial action. (p.166)

School systems which are committed to improving their classrooms for Aboriginal students must look internally at their role in educating students.

Within the school systems lie another major factor contributing to the failure of Aboriginal students, low teacher expectations. "Low teacher expectations and counseling of Indian students into vocationally-oriented curricula have been identified as among the factors contributing to this [drop out rate] attrition" (Bowker, 1993) (Dingman et al., 1995, p.10). The number of Aboriginal students found in remedial type courses is a clear indication how low teacher expectation effects student success:

The over-representation of Native students in general and basic level courses has been confirmed in a latter study by MacKay and Myles (1989) which found that 'Native students are consistently 'placed' willingly and unwillingly in general and basic levels. (Brady, 1996, p.16)

Melnechenko and Horsman's (1998) research supports the conclusion that teachers hold lower expectations for Aboriginal students, and consequently, these students are channeled into remedial classes:

Aboriginal students find themselves removed from the mainstream and segregated into remedial programs in disproportionately large numbers. Too often these remedial classes lack the hallmarks of challenging engaging curriculum . (Melnechenko & Horsman, 1998, p. 9)

Lack of cultural content in the classroom, lack of parental support, and low teacher expectations are only three of many factors educators identify as contributing to the success and failure of Aboriginal students in high school. Even with the knowledge collected over the last two decades, there is little research showing that the educators have made changes in order to promote success rather than failure in schools.

With a track record as such, why focus on factors contributing to failure?

Educators must change their point of view to examine what factors contribute to the limited

success which Aboriginal students experience in school. Working from this foundation, educators may succeed in changing the educational system for marginalized Aboriginal high school students.

Success Factors in Aboriginal Education

Studying the factors contributing to the success of Aboriginal students in high school may lead to concrete alternatives in the conventional educational system. The first step is to shift the focus of researchers from failure to success. Bempechat (1998) supports the need for educators to shift their focus from reasons for failure in school to those contributing to success in the classroom:

...our anxieties over school failure should be driving our efforts to understand success...It stands to reason then, that we will learn a great deal about promoting school success by studying those students who seem to defy the odds. (p. 5)

When looking for students who defy the odds, Aboriginal high school students, who have met some success in schools, become the perfect study group. Their insights into factors which helped them to succeed in school become a valuable tool for transforming the educational system to meet the needs of those students who have been neglected or for whom some programming efforts have been applied.

Unfortunately, literature referring to Aboriginal students' success is in short supply. In one relevant study, Pelletier (1993) researched Aboriginal students in high school. "The purpose of the study was to identify those factors which Indian and Metis students perceived as influencing the competition of their high school education" (p.i). Students identified factors contributing to success to be themselves, family, friends, and school extra-curricular activities.

In a more recent study, Cleary and Peacock (1998), queried both Native American and non-Native American teachers in the United States about Aboriginal education. "In

this book we have collected teachers' wisdom about American Indian education: about how it has been, how it is, and how it might be" (p. 1). The researchers identified issues effecting the success of Aboriginal youth. The themes included teachers, cultural difference, oppression, Native language and self-motivation.

Melnechenko and Horsman (1998), with the help of other researchers (Johns, 1994; Barnhardt, 1994), identify several factors, some common to Pelletier (1993) and Cleary and Peacock (1998), leading to success for middle years Aboriginal students:

Outside factors [contributing to success] were: favorable government policies, family support and encouragement, supportive peer friendships, and adequate family incomes. Factors within the school and classroom were: community involvement in the school, positive student support services, culturally relevant curriculum, accommodation of different learning styles, and a learning environment that is responsive to culturally diverse students. (p.2)

Melnechenko and Horsman (1998) identify an important study group in middle years Aboriginal students, while Pelletier (1993) expands the study to include Aboriginal high school students in Saskatchewan. These researchers reinforce the need to transform the educational system into an institution to support the needs of most students.

Researchers identify community as a factor contributing to the educational success of Aboriginal students. Interestingly, students in Pelletier's (1993) study do not place a lot of importance on community as a factor contributing to success. "The majority of students viewed the community as being neutral or non-supportive" (p. i). This inconsistency may be explained by students' inability to recognize the help and support the community provides in their education. As Pelletier explained, "Students viewed the 'community' as being different entities. Some students, even though they went to school in the city, saw the reserve as being their community.

McInerney et al.'s (1997) study relies on the voice of staff, students, parents, and community members which identify reasons for success in Navajo schools:

It is clear from the interviews that the most important influence on school motivation was the family. Teachers were rated the second most important, and peers were the third. Other factors, such as the relevance of the curriculum, opportunity for employment, and cultural values were also significant but to a lesser extent. (p.14)

Melnechenko and Horsman (1998) also support community involvement as a factor contributing to the success of Aboriginal students in school. "Opportunities for student success is enhanced when children learn within their community and when we bring the community into the classroom" (p.17). The united effort of community, parents, and educators may lead to educational success for Aboriginal students in high school.

Family involvement is another major factor contributing to success in school. "There is overwhelming evidence to demonstrate that parents, closely followed by the extended family, are the prime referent groups in influencing a students' progress in school" (Parent & Bunderson, 1996) (McInerney et al., 1997, p. 8). The students in Pelletier's (1993) study supported home and family as factors contributing to their success in high school. "All of the students, except three, wrote of the support they received from their home and family. Support from home and family included support from: parents, mother being mentioned more than fathers; stepparents; grandparents; and siblings" (p. 56).

While clearly parents add to the success of Aboriginal students, lack of Aboriginal parental involvement remains a reality in schools. Pocha (2000) asked parents what is needed in order for their children to succeed in school. Parents in Pocha's study identified two major factors: belonging and encouragement as needed in order for Aboriginal youth to succeed.

One of the most important factors would be teachers who really accepted and valued the students:

The teachers valued them [students] as Aboriginal people so that they felt like they belonged in their classroom and school...The second important

expectation found in the interviews relates to encouragement. The parents revealed...a heartfelt desire for teachers to provide continuous encouragement for their children.” (p.52)

The opportunity for Aboriginal parents to participate in a discussion around their children’s education is empowering. The parents’ voices and experiences connect the parents to the school and allow the possibility for further involvement in the school.

Friends are another important group which influence success for Aboriginal students in high school. Students identify friends as a positive and negative influence on success in school:

Support from friends included general support and encouragement to remain in school and be successful. Support also included specific strategies such as study groups for exams and homework, assistance with notes from classes missed, advice on classes, and encouragement to participate in extra curricular activities. (Pelletier, 1993, p.58)

Success Defined

One difficulty in a study of this type is defining ‘success’. Defining success, especially across cultures, communities, or families, is complex. Does culture play a role in defining success? If so, how much of a role does it play in promoting success? Educators differ as to the degree to which culture affects success in school. Melnechenko and Horsman (1998) believe “every student wants to believe in himself or herself as a successful person. However, one of the obstacles in looking at the factors contributing to Aboriginal student success in school is the definition of success” (p.7). On the other hand, Cleary and Peacock (1998), citing a wealth of researchers, indicate all students possess the same base needs for attaining success in school:

What works with American Indian students seems to work because humans have by nature: curiosity, an inclination toward self-expression, and inclination toward imitation, responsiveness to feedback (Frazier, 1982), a desire for self-determination, and a desire for feelings of competence. (Ames & Ames, 1984, 1989; Deci, 1975, 1985; Stipek, 1988) (p. 201)

It is important to recognize the debate around culture as a factor contributing or detracting

from education. The purpose of this thesis, however, is not to debate the point, but simply acknowledge culture plays a role, positive or negative, in the success of Aboriginal high school students. If educators are consumed with the debate over the role culture plays in defining success, the real goal of restructuring education will be forgotten.

The Lack of a Universal Solution

A second challenge in this study was the potential desire, by educators, to apply universally factors contributing to success to all Aboriginal students. Educators debate whether an application as such is appropriate. "Because First Nations communities across Canada are unique, with different social and cultural values, levels of economic development, and internal administrative structures, it is difficult, if not impossible, to apply a universal blueprint for success" (MacKay & Myles, 1995, p. 171). MacKay and Myles continue to warn against sweeping global policy aimed at obtaining success in all schools. "Successful intervention for the students of one First Nation may be very distinct from successful intervention for the students of another First Nation" (p. 160).

McInerney et al. (1997), disputing the warning of MacKay and Myles (1995), draw a similarity between the educational needs of all students. "Earlier psychometric studies have indicated that the motivational profiles of Navajo students are very similar to those of other Indigenous and Western groups" (McInerney et al., 1997, p.13). The important message these researchers send is educators must make it a priority to learn more about the vastly different Aboriginal groups in North America before they attempt to apply universal solutions where specific solutions are needed.

Summary

In researching Aboriginal high school students, my hope is to find several common factors leading to success while recognizing that they may not work for all learning styles (Cajete, 1999). The foundation of success factors identified in the study will assist in transforming the educational system from one of Eurocentrism, to a system which recognizes and addresses the needs of all students in the classroom.

The historical background leading up to present day Aboriginal education is one of oppression and marginalization. Many researchers have examined education in an attempt to identify where the system fails. The key to building on past research and uncovering further factors which contribute to the success of Aboriginal high school students is to listen. Students, through their stories and experiences, offer factors which allow them to be success in school. Focus groups, as sharing circles, offers a culturally relevant and comfortable atmosphere for sharing their stories and experiences.

CHAPTER THREE

REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCEDURES

Introduction

Focus group methodology, in the form of sharing circles, offers a culturally appropriate research technique for sharing stories and experiences while collecting research data. The focus group methodology, as a sharing circle, provides an opportunity for research participants to express their stories and experiences while performing a critical role in the research study.

This critical review explores the history of focus groups as a method for qualitative educational research. Once the historical literature of focus group methodology is completed, the focus will change to examine literature which places the focus group methodology within the context of this particular study. Topic areas are (a) a history of focus groups as qualitative research; (b) the focus group method in the research context; (c) the moderator in the focus group process; (d) the focus group size; and (e) criteria for selection of group participants. Finally, a description of the data collection and data analysis processes will be outlined.

A History of Focus Groups as Qualitative Research

Focus groups are a result of inefficiencies discovered when researchers collected data using traditional methods, such as close ended individual interviews. “In the late 1930s social scientists began investigating the value of non directive individual

interviewing as an improved source of information” (Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub, 1996, p. 4). The open-ended question approach allowed the participant to explore and share personal experiences more fully than close-ended individual questions. Open-ended questioning led researchers to explore other methods of allowing controlled open-ended conversation for data collection. The wave resulted in the development of focus group interviewing. Krueger (1994) defines “a focus group[as] a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non threatening environment” (p.6). Noonan (1997) adds, “Focus groups are based on the principles of qualitative research, which is an inductive process that researchers use to explore perceptions about a topic or to develop a clear understanding of an issue” (p.1). Until recently, focus groups were mainly used as a marketing tool to identify trends or examine customer satisfaction in relation to products or services (Krueger 1994; Noonan 1997; Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub 1996). Researchers have recognized the value of extending the focus group into the educational arena.

Focus Groups with Adolescents

Although the origin of focus groups lies in the marketing arena, the methodology is becoming increasingly relevant in educational research. “It is becoming increasingly clear that researchers and practitioners in education and psychology need to ascertain the perspectives of key stakeholders, such as clients, parents, teachers, and students” (Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub, 1996, p. 4). Vaughn, Schumm and Sinagub (1996) identify several reasons focus groups work in an educational setting. Focus groups offer “(a) variety and versatility for both qualitative and quantitative research methods, (b) compatibility with the qualitative research paradigm, (c) opportunity for direct contact with subjects, (d) advantages of group format, and (e) utility” (p.12).

As consumers of educational services, students should have an opportunity to provide their general or specific perspective to educators. Focus groups are particularly useful when conducting research involving adolescents. “Focus groups with special populations of children or adolescents can provide valuable information about their unique familial experiences” (p.131). The researcher must also keep in mind the special circumstances of children or adolescents in discussion groups. “Focus groups should not be conducted with children below 6 years of age” (p. 132). Children this young are unable to express themselves as required in a study.

Research involving adolescence requires a methodology which will elicit participation and ensure comfort in a discussion. Focus groups lend themselves to research involving adolescents for several reasons (a) the participants are usually eager to be heard; (b) the participants are comfortable conversing with their peers; (c) the moderator, usually an adult, assumes the role of listening and not interfering with the discussion for most of the session. It is the researcher’s experience that adolescents desire to have their voice acknowledged in a decision-making and a transformational process.

Vaughn, Schumm and Sinagub (1996), supported by Spethmann (1992) suggest “that focus groups with children should be comprised of same sex participants. Young children and adolescents may be uncomfortable or distracted in a group with individuals of the opposite sex...” (p.132). The researcher supports this claim as the five female participants in the study spoke freely and expressed their appreciation that there was not a male in the sharing circles as this may have limited their answers.

Sharing Circles as Focus Groups

The use of Aboriginal sharing circles was a method of decision-making used long before European colonization and research processes involving the creation of focus

groups. Focus groups are closely related to traditional Aboriginal talking or sharing circles as they both developed naturally from dialogues. "First Nations people have always used the sharing circle for council meetings, spiritual ceremonies, healing, and teaching" (Hart, 1996, p. 69). Bopp, Bopp, Brown and Lane (1984) further explain the traditional use of the sharing circle. "The talking circle was the forum used to allow each member of the tribe to participate directly and actively into the affairs of the tribe. Each person in a circle was given the opportunity to voice their opinions, thoughts and concerns" (p.1). The manner in which the sharing circles were carried out displayed the respectful nature of Aboriginal people in decision-making and teaching.

The specific sharing circle process varies from tribe to tribe, but the overall process is very similar. Participants sit in a circle facing inward. Once the sharing circle begins coming or going is discouraged as this breaks the sequence and concentration of the discussion. A neutral moderator leads the discussion. The moderator does not control the discussion, but directs the flow of the sharing and ensures the guidelines are followed by the participants. The person to the left of the moderator begins to answer questions or talk while holding a rock or object indicating permission to speak. In some cultures, a stick, a feather or other object was used. The rock then continues on to the left until it reaches the moderator. The rock goes around again with each question.

Hart (1996), supported by other researchers (Katz & St. Denis 1991; Scott 1991), acknowledges the value and appropriateness of the sharing circle as a method of data collection in educational research. "Various methods of utilizing the circle have evolved and some methods now guide teachers, helpers, and others to address various points including learning, helping, and supporting" (p.59). There must be guidelines observed in any sharing circle, but the rules become even more important when conducting sharing circles with adolescents. Their vulnerability and age must be respected by researchers.

Provincial Judge Graydon Nicholas (n.d.) outlines guidelines which should be observed in a sharing circle:

1. Respect yourself and others.
2. Silence is an acceptable response.
3. Individuals address themselves to the issue under discussion and not directly to comments made by another individual.
4. The holder of the stone has the right to speak. She/he can express opinion, make an analytic statement, describe a personal experience or share emotions that they are experiencing.

Focus Groups Method in the Research Context

In this study the Aboriginal students had an opportunity to relate their stories and experiences in manner respected and recognized in Aboriginal culture. This study was qualitative using a narrative approach in the form of sharing circles of 6 to 8 students.

In consultation with the school records secretary, students matching the outlined criteria were identified for the study. Through school records the Aboriginal students were screened by the recording secretary using the following at risk criteria provided in the students cumulative folder: attendance difficulties, school mobility, and placement in remedial or alternate educational programming. The records secretary approached the students regarding their interest in participating in the study. A list of interested students was passed on to the researcher.

The researcher met each student individually for one session and two times as a group in sharing circle discussions with grade twelve Aboriginal students who were defined as at risk by literature and poised to graduate in June 2002. The individual meeting and sharing circle discussions took place in a classroom at the inner city high school.

During the individual meeting, the researcher described in clear terms the purpose of the study, its proposed methods and processes and answered any questions the

participant had regarding the process. A personal background of the researcher was provided in an attempt to develop a base comfort level for the remainder of the study. General dialogue added to the development of this comfort level.

In the first sharing circle session, the researcher asked the participants thirteen questions (Appendix A) and provided time to respond. Additional probing questions were used to clarify any information relating to the questions asked of the participants. The researcher, as moderator, conducted the sharing circle. A recording assistant supervised the tape recording of the sharing circle and took notes which named the speakers as they contributed to the discussion. The initial meeting lasted 120 minutes. The content of the tapes were later transcribed to written transcripts by a bonded typist.

In the first sharing circle, there was a buzz in the air as it was lunch hour in the school. The participants were not afraid to talk to the researcher or other participants in the room. They were comfortable around one another. This was evident in the depth of answers given by the second question. The participants were crying and expressing themselves to the researcher and other participants. It was a very supportive environment. Humor provided some break from the sorrow in the circle when the researcher had no kleenex, only Family Pizza napkins, for the participants to wipe their tears. The sharing continued at an in-depth level. Due to the nature of the information shared, the researcher informed the participants a counselor at the school was available for them to speak to as if needed. As the researcher would be leaving the school, a counselor was informed generally about the nature of the sharing circle and the possibility of a participant approaching if help was needed.

In the second sharing circle, the researcher provided the participants with six questions (Appendix B) developed from the themes identified in the first sharing circle and allowed them the opportunity to add any further thoughts or ideas regarding their initial

responses. Additional probing questions were used to clarify any information relating to the questions asked of the participants. The researcher, as moderator, conducted the sharing circle. The recording assistant supervised the tape recording of the sharing circle and took notes again naming the speakers as they contributed to the discussion. The meeting lasted 60 minutes. The content of the tapes were later transcribed to written transcripts by a bonded typist.

In the second sharing circle, the participants were quite serious. They answered the questions and at the end there was a sense, by the researcher, that the topic had been exhausted by the students.

Later, a copy of the written transcript of the total session and a data/transcript release form were provided to each participant at the school. The researcher and participants reviewed the transcript together. Once the participants were satisfied the transcripts accurately reflected what they said in the sharing circles, they returned the signed release form and the corrected versions, while keeping a copy of the transcripts for their records.

The characteristics of this focus group: freedom to speak, the sufficient time and space to be heard, and a comfortable environment lend themselves to research with adolescence. It was my experience that adolescence value the chance to share their points of view. The opportunity to have an adult and several peers listening to their stories and experiences enhanced the focus groups. The participants in this study were very comfortable in the sharing circles. This was characterized by tears and laughter by the third question. For the above reasons, the researcher believed a sharing circle would be particularly relevant in this research study involving Aboriginal high school students.

Moderator in the Focus Group Process

In this study the researcher served as the moderator. The moderator's role was central to the success of a focus group (Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub, 1996). The moderator must not assume the role of an interviewer and consequently must have particular skills, such as being a good listener and showing sincere interest in the conversation at hand. The moderator must also maintain control of the pace and direction of the conversation in a gentle manner. "The focus group is not a collection of simultaneous individual interviews but rather a group discussion where the conversation flows because of the nurturing of the moderator" (Krueger, 1994, p.100). The moderator must be informed of the topic and be able to solicit information from the participants to gather knowledge on this topic.

Focus Group Size-Literature and Research Process

Vaughn, Schumm and Sinagub (1996) maintain a core element of focus group methodology is establishing a small group with 6 to 12 homogeneous members. Exceptions must be made for children or adolescents. "The size of the focus group for children and adolescents needs to be smaller (usually around five or six participants) than for adults" (p.132). As well, the length of the focus group should be approximately half the time limit allotted to adults. In the study, 5 female students participated.

Criteria and Selection of Participants - Literature and Research Process

The participants for this study were Aboriginal high school students in grade twelve who were defined as at risk by literature and anticipated graduating in June 2002. In consultation with the E.D. Feehan Catholic High School records secretary, students matching the outlined criteria were identified for the study.

Through school records the Aboriginal students were screened by the recording secretary using the following at risk criteria provided in the students cumulative folder: attendance difficulties, school mobility, and placement in remedial or alternate educational programming.

The records secretary approached the students regarding their interest in participating in the study. The recording secretary provided a list of students who were interested in participating in the study to the researcher. The study was explained to each student individually. Once 6-8 students agreed to continue with the study, they were given a consent form to be completed and returned to the researcher.

The participants were deemed successful grade twelve Aboriginal high school students who as defined by literature (Welch & Sheridan 1995; Passow 1970) were considered as at risk. The first criterion was the participant had to be successfully attending high school and were anticipating graduation in that year. For this study, success was defined as anticipated grade twelve graduation. The student had to be poised to graduate in June 2002 with at least twenty-four credit units as prescribed by Saskatchewan Education. The second criterion was the participants were of Aboriginal ancestry. The students self identified verbally or through school records as First Nations or Metis and as such qualified for the study. The final criterion being, at risk, involved several secondary criteria the participants met in order to participate in the study.

The at risk label is a Eurocentric educational discourse aimed at othering students who do not fit the mold of 'normality' valued in schools. All too often, Aboriginal students are placed in this category. I do not agree with the label, but feel it necessary to recognize, in the study, the term as part of the struggle Aboriginal students endure in education. The students chosen for the study have been labeled 'at risk' and deserve the chance to make public, through sharing circles, their struggle to challenge the Eurocentric

label by graduating from a system which for the most part deserted them.

The definitions of at risk can vary greatly, but it is possible to identify several characteristics common to at risk students. Welch and Sheridan (1995) identify two common characteristics:

An [at risk student is] any child or youth who, due to disabling, cultural, economic, or medical conditions, is (a) denied or has minimum equal opportunities and resources in a variety of settings and (b) is in jeopardy of failing to become a successful and meaningful member of his or her community (ie. home, school, and business). (p. 31)

At risk students are considered educationally disadvantaged due to social class, race, ethnic origin, poverty, sex, or geographic location, and many come to school with attitudes, knowledge, or skills incompatible with learning in schools (Passow 1970). The definition of an at risk student covers a broad spectrum of youth in schools. The broad definition, with so many variables, explains educators' inability to understand these pupils and more importantly, explains why there is a lack of innovative educational alternatives present for educating this growing number of students. The at risk student designation is increasing each year because students do not satisfy the traditional definition of success in schools.

The participants in this study met the following criteria to be considered at risk:

1. Attendance

Had been removed or dropped a class due to lack of attendance in their high school career.

2. School Mobility

Had been registered at several schools since grade one.

3. Academic Programing

Placed in a remedial or alternative program at one time during their educational career.

Data Analysis - Literature and Research Process

The medicine wheel is a valuable framework for organizing factors into themes which contribute to Aboriginal students' success in high school. The ancient Aboriginal framework is also culturally appropriate as a tool for helping Aboriginal students to decolonize Aboriginal education through their voice and experience. The students in the study, although familiar with sharing circles, had never participated in one before the study.

A better understanding of the medicine wheel as an ancient and contemporary mechanism for analyzing education will support its use as a framework for studying Aboriginal students in high school. The medicine wheel is defined by Bopp et al. (1984) in

The Sacred Tree:

This is an ancient symbol used by almost all the Native people of North and South America. There are many different ways that this basic concept is expressed: the four grandfathers, the four winds, the four cardinal directions, and many other relationships that can be expressed in sets of four. Just like a mirror can be used to see things not normally visible (e.g. behind us or around a corner), the medicine wheel can be used to help us see or understand things we can't quite see or understand because they are ideas and not physical objects. (p.9)

The four aspects of nature: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual are key components of the medicine wheel (Appendix C). Regnier (1995), in a study of Joe Duquette High School and the Sacred Circle describes the medicine wheel in greater depth:

The symbolic Sacred Circle is divided into four directions (north, south, east, and west) representing the four races (white, black, red, and yellow), the four aspects of humanness (emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual), the four cycles of life (birth, childhood, adulthood, and death), the four elements (fire, water, wind, and earth), and the four seasons (spring, summer, fall, and winter). (p.317)

Teachers at Joe Duquette High School use the medicine wheel to understand and develop education in the hope of creating a successful environment for its students (Regnier, 1995). Several Aboriginal researchers (Graveline 1998; Dyck 1998; Hampton 1995) have used the four realms of the medicine wheel as a framework for their analysis of various

aspects of Eurocentric consciousness, schooling, or Western science. Other researchers (Calliou 1995; Pepper & Henry 1995) have used the framework for understanding history, or developing a peacekeeping pedagogy.

Graveline (1998) examines Eurocentric consciousness with the help of the medicine wheel. She quotes Gunn Allen (1986) when providing a valuable lesson on the origin of the medicine wheel and its benefits in the modern world:

Medicine Wheels are actually ancient rock formations used for contact with Ancestral spirit forms during ceremony. However the metaphor is also used by modern-day Traditionalists to illustrate/invoke/reinspire understandings of Ancestral beliefs in this contemporary work of separation and abstraction. (p.75)

As a modern day framework for critically examining the education system, the medicine wheel is invaluable. Graveline (1998) describes the value of the medicine wheel when analyzing education. "The holistic perspective promoted by the use of the Medicine Wheel permits one to see the entire educational process as a complex, integrated whole; psychological, spiritual, emotional, and physical are all part of the human consciousness and are inseparable" (p. 76). Presently, if educators were to examine the educational system using the medicine wheel, it would depict a medicine wheel out of balance (Appendix D). "Helping students succeed implies that intellectual, emotional, spiritual and physical needs will be recognized and a balance among these needs will be established and maintained" (Campbell, 1991, p.6).

Dyck (1998) redefines science using the medicine wheel (Appendix E). "What I will do in this paper is to examine the way I, as a Western-trained scientist, do science using the medicine wheel of the Plains Indians as a framework for analysis" (p.91). Dyck's analysis, using the medicine wheel, is perhaps one of the most important steps in decolonization, because it challenges the Western scientific worldview tenants she internalized and accepted for much of her life. This type of self evaluation, on the part of individuals, would bring balance and harmony to the educational system, and on a larger

scale, society.

Calliou (1995), quoting Pepper and Henry (1991), elaborates further on the medicine wheel. "The wheel is a circle of harmony and courage which symbolizes the integration of physical, mental, spiritual, and cultural aspects of living" (p.51). She describes the medicine wheel as a tool to better understand and develop a process of peacekeeping in the world. "The medicine wheel assisted me to examine the interconnectedness of [racism, multiculturalism, and anti-racist ideologies] while considering the emotional, physical, cognitive, and spiritual realms of peacekeeping..." (p.69). Calliou provides a concrete diagram of the medicine wheel illustrating a peacekeeping pedagogy (Appendix F).

Educators (Hampton, 1995; Cajete, 1994) utilize the medicine wheel framework as an analytical tool to not only to critique society, but also to illustrate their consciousness more closely connected to Aboriginal philosophy. Through traditional teachings Hampton (1995) has come to understand the six directions of our being: Spirit, East, South, West, North, and Earth. Hampton (1995) successfully melds ceremonial teachings about the six directions, provided to him by spiritual leaders, into a theory for redefining Indian education. "Each direction reminds me of a complex set of meanings, feelings, relationships, and movements...I finally could not deny the six directions as I sat with Miles and Huberman's (1984) *Qualitative Data Analysis* and tried to formulate a tactic for generating meaning" (Hampton, 1995, p.16). Hampton (1995) places the data into an Aboriginal reality taught to him. The framework then became a culturally appropriate technique for redefining Indian education. "The six directions are a way of thinking about existing in the universe. This pattern organizes and clarifies thoughts. It directs us to think of Indian education as dynamic" (p.16). Hampton's (1995) framework is similar to the medicine wheel as an organizational tool to understand data. Hampton's ultimate goal

is to use the interpreted the data in a manner easily understood by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators:

The relationship between the six directions, interview categories (themes), and the standards for Indian education are complex. (Appendix G)
Generally, I let the directions and the interview data evoke meanings and I then summarized the meanings in standards. (p.18)

Hampton's (1995) framework for analyzing data supports the use of the medicine wheel for examining factors which contribute to the success of Aboriginal students in high school.

Cajete (1994) uses cyclical concepts to describe American Indian tribes "rightful orientation" in the world, a contemporary pathway for ecological vision and the Indigenous stages of developmental learning. Although there are many different Aboriginal tribes in North America, several key understandings do apply a considerable number of tribes. Cajete (1993) discusses foundations of American Indigenous education and outlines a common understanding accepted by many tribes.

The majority of American Indian tribes recognize seven sacred or elemental directions. These directions include East, West, North, South, Zenith, Nadir, and the Center. Through deep understanding and expression of the metaphoric meaning of these orientations, American Indians have intimately defined their *place* in the universe. (p.37)

The elements and cyclical process described are foundations of the medicine wheel concept. Cajete (1994) adopts the cyclical model when describing a contemporary pathway for ecological vision (Appendix H). In Aboriginal tribal tradition, the pathway to vision follows a process marked by several key elements. "This learning path begins with appropriate orientation, acknowledging relationships, setting intentions, seeking, creating, understanding, sharing, and then celebrating one's vision with reference to a place of centering" (p.69). In Aboriginal ecology, the cyclical pathway for vision is connected to many other cyclical patterns going on in our lives.

Cajete (1994) adopts cyclical notions once again to discuss the Indigenous stages

of developmental learning. "Much of Indigenous education can be called 'endogenous' education; it revolves around a transformational process of learning by bringing forth illumination from one's ego center" (p.208). In order to be educated, each person in a tribe goes through the transformation of self. The process of transformation is characterized by anything but peace of mind, tranquility, and harmony. Individuals are required to search within themselves and their community to find a "new order and higher level of consciousness. Harmony is achieved through such a process, but it lasts for only a short time before it has to be revised as people and their circumstances change. This is the endogenous dynamic of Tribal education (Appendix I)" (p.209). The struggle to attain and maintain balance and harmony in one's life as characterized by Cajete's (1994) concept is also represented by the medicine wheel concept where there is a constant search to reach and maintain balance in our lives. The strength of such a parallel adds support to the medicine wheel framework as a tool for assisting in rebalancing the educational system through the eyes of Aboriginal high school students.

In the study, the researcher uses the four aspects of the medicine wheel as a loose framework on which to analyze the data collected from Aboriginal high school students in grade twelve who were poised to graduate in June 2002. Why do these students succeed where so many others have failed? As Campbell (1991) points out, the students' success implies the four aspects of the medicine wheels are recognized and in balance. The students' answers to the focus group questions identified success factors for each of the four realms of the medicine wheel. It is also important to note the researcher allowed the data to define clearly the aspects of the medicine wheel; the framework did not define the data. The findings examined in the framework lead to ideas for bringing Aboriginal education into a balanced state.

Research Ethics

Aboriginal peoples have been the subject of research for many years. In the past and many times in the present, their involvement was limited to the role of the object. Due to their lack of input into the research process, they were and still are nearly always misquoted and misunderstood. The often flawed and invalid Aboriginal data gathered by Eurocentric researchers leads to the creation of concepts such as the 'imaginary Indian' Francis (1992) explores in an examination of Aboriginal people and media. "Advertising reinforced the belief that the best Indian was the historical Indian. It used the Indian as a symbol to appeal to modern consumers who admired values they associated with pre-industrial society" (p.176). More recently, informed research has been conducted in a more respectful manner, yet there are still instances where Aboriginal people are mistreated by researchers. "In many cases, research has been conducted in respectful ways and has contributed to the well-being of aboriginal communities. In others, aboriginal peoples have not been treated with a high degree of respect by researchers" (Research Involving Aboriginal Peoples, 1999, p.3). Due to the mistreatment of Aboriginal peoples in research, guidelines are needed if research is to respect and involve Aboriginal peoples.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Aboriginal Peoples, published by the Medical Research Council of Canada, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, the Social Sciences and Psychological Association, the Canadian Psychological Association, Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies, American Anthropological Association, and the Canadian Sociological and Anthropology Association clearly outline guidelines for those wishing to conduct research among Aboriginal peoples. "The councils affirm that in developing ethical standards and practices, aboriginal peoples have rights and interests which deserve recognition and respect by the research community" (Research Involving

Aboriginal Peoples, 1999, p.1). In this study, the researcher was aware and committed to following the guidelines and recommendations outlined by the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research involving Aboriginal peoples. The researcher was also guided by a research committee who ensured respect was given to the Aboriginal participants in the study. The researcher, being Metis, was also aware of Aboriginal cultural protocols involving sharing circles.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE VOICE OF ABORIGINAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

I Lost My Talk

I lost my talk
The talk you took away.
When I was a little girl
At Shubenacadie school.

You snatched it away:
I speak like you
I think like you
I create like you
The scrambled ballad, about my word.

Two ways I talk
Both ways I say,
your way is more powerful.

So gently I offer my hand and ask,
Let me find my talk
So I can teach you about me.

Rita Joe (1998)

Introduction

The purpose of this introduction is to explain the rationale for choosing sharing circles as the method of data collection, to introduce the students who participated in the study and to introduce the medicine wheel as a framework for the data analysis. The fundamental foundation of this study is to report the expression of student voice in relation to success in high school. Stories and experiences, as presented by the participants in the sharing circles, provided emerging themes organized in the context of a medicine wheel framework. More importantly, the expression of voice allowed the participants to learn more about themselves. Their stories and experiences led to conclusions in this study

which may assist educators in decolonizing Aboriginal education. Although the participants may not be aware, they played a role in challenging the Eurocentric principles guiding education as it is known today. An opportunity to deconstruct conventional education by working from a base of positive factors, as opposed to retelling negative factors, provided a new and underutilized method for examining the educational system.

Sharing circles offered a comfortable and culturally appropriate alternative to the traditional focus group method of gathering data. It was an excellent method for adolescents to meet and share knowledge. The guidelines overseeing the sharing circles created an environment of equity and respect for all participants, which is very important to the youth of today.

The data provided by the participants were organized in themes under the categories of the medicine wheel. The ancient framework has four realms: spiritual, emotional, physical and mental. Balance and harmony of an individual's life is achieved when all four realms are equally satisfied in day to day life. The model can be adapted to organize success factors identified by Aboriginal high school students. The adaptation of the traditional medicine wheel serves as a concrete model indicating factors needed to achieve success for Aboriginal students.

A Description of the Participants

The participants were given the opportunity to choose a fictitious name to be used within the study. They found it fun choosing names they always wanted but did not receive. All other individuals named in the study were given a pseudonym.

Trisha was an eighteen year old female in grade twelve. She was Cree and had grown up in the city. Trisha was an alternative education student and had spent most of her school years in special programs. Alternate education accommodates students who possess a lower IQ than other students. They focus on life skills as opposed to the traditional curriculum. At the beginning, she was quite reserved and tentative about answering the questions. Trisha did not have a lot to say in the sharing circles, but what she did share was very profound and insightful. She was always very polite. The structure of the sharing circles allowed her to share her story within a respectful environment.

Nikita was a twenty-two year old in grade twelve. She was Cree and had spent most of her years in the city. She was a proud mother of one child and while she was close to her family, she lived on her own. Nikita was a very trusting and open student. She shared personal and educational stories and experiences. Nikita faced many struggles in her life and school was one major challenge. The sharing circle allowed her to share deeply her feelings. Nikita spoke from the heart and respected the process of the sharing circle.

Sici was an eighteen year old in grade twelve. She was a proud Metis who was beginning to understand her heritage. Sici lived with her mother and father. She was a conscientious student who spoke very eloquently about her personal and educational experiences. She trusted the sharing circle process and shared information with the other participants as if they had been lifelong friends.

Zeara was a seventeen year old female in grade twelve. Her ethnic background was both Asian and Metis ancestry. She was only recently beginning to understand her Metis background. Zeara was very “bubbly and perky” in manner. She lived with an aunt and uncle, but was in contact with her mother. Zeara offered an enormous amount of information in the sharing circles. Zeara spoke openly and honestly with a great level of respect for the other participants within the sharing circle.

Shelly was a seventeen year old female in grade twelve. Her Metis ancestry was a new concept in her identity. She lived with her father. Her mother, who was Aboriginal, never shared the story of her ethnic heritage with Shelly. Shelly was noticeably nervous at the sharing circles, but after a while she opened up with her stories and experiences. The sharing circles seemed to offer her an opportunity to share and listen in manner never experienced in the past.

The participants represented Indian and Metis cultures raised in an urban setting. The experiences of urban life had played a major role in defining the identity of each participant. The urban influence caused differences in the participants acceptance and understanding of their Aboriginal ancestry. Nikita and Trisha, students of Plains Cree heritage who were visible minorities, had many struggles in life, but appeared comfortable with their ethnic background. Nikita, a twenty-two year old mother of one, offered a unique point of view to the sharing circle. Trisha, eighteen years old, struggled with the academic agenda of school, but compensated socially with many friends. Sici, now eighteen and free from her father’s wishes to have the family identified as white, proudly embraced her Metis ancestry. Zeara, an eighteen year old participant with a diverse ethnic background, seemed to realize and understand the the depth of her Metis ancestry during the sharing circles. Shelly, who was eighteen years old, knew her mother was Aboriginal, but did not keep in touch. She seemed hesitant to acknowledge her Metis

ancestry, but willing to explore it further in the sharing circles.

In the initial phase of the study, both participants acknowledged their Aboriginal ancestry. As the sharing circles progressed, they seemed more comfortable, almost proud of being Metis. This point was evident when Shelly went home after the initial circle to talk about her ancestry with her mother.

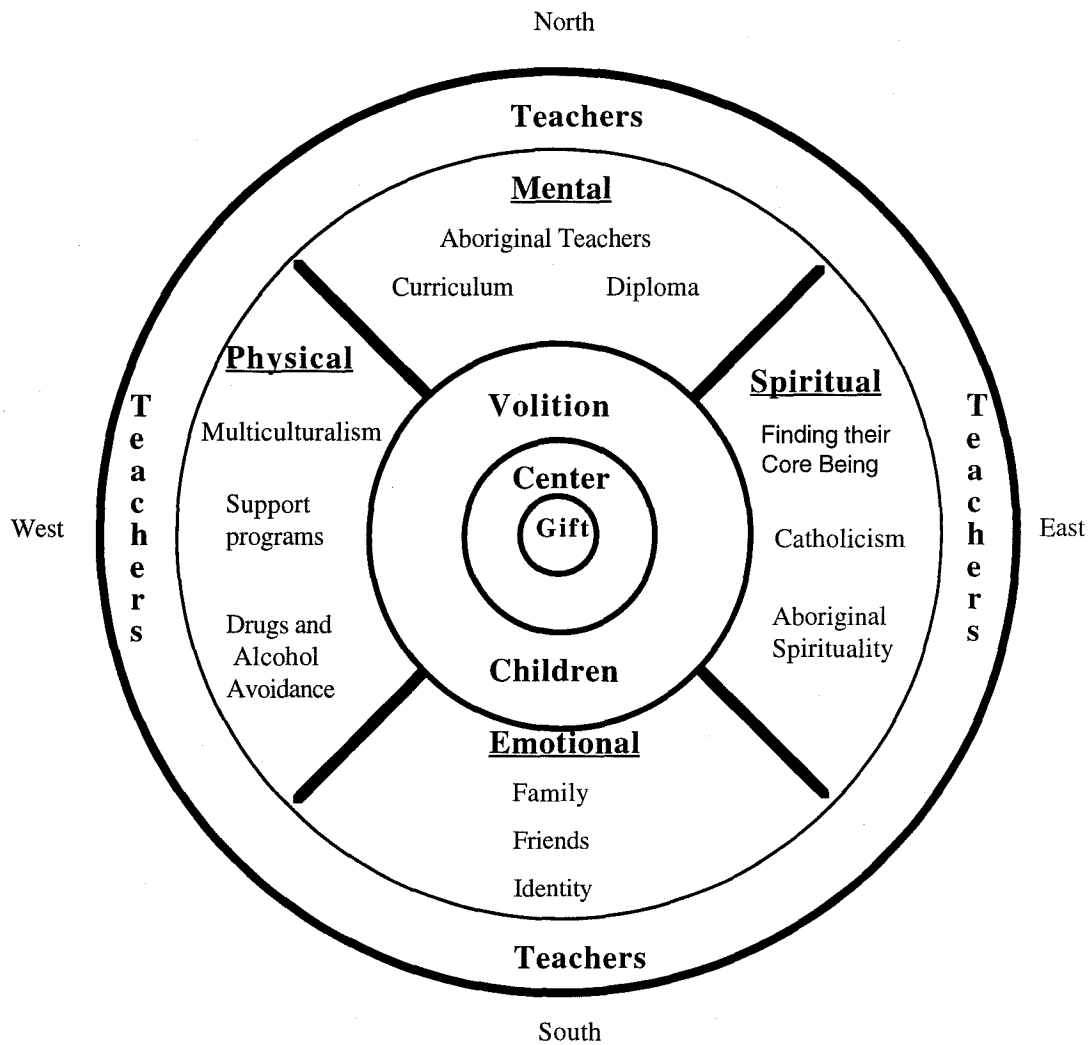
The five participants offered an abundance of data through the sharing circles. Their stories and experiences brought laughter, anger, and tears. The themes, ideas and concepts which contributed to their success was analyzed in an adaptation of the traditional medicine wheel framework.

The Medicine Wheel:

A Framework for Analyzing Aboriginal Educational Success

The traditional medicine wheel offered a framework for organizing the data provided by the five participants (see Appendix C). The information presented in this chapter represented the stories, experiences, and lessons of five female Aboriginal high school students and summarized in the following medicine wheel framework. The data was organized into seven elements. The elements included the ecological center and volition at the core. The spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental realms surrounded the core while, the last crucial element, teachers, completed the medicine wheel as a final ring surrounding everything.

A Summary of the Study Findings in a Medicine Wheel Format



The data provided in this thesis were exactly as recorded in the sharing circles. The data were categorized into key topics to provide clarity for the reader. At times a word or two was added, in brackets, to clarify the speaker's point. Much of the information was written between the lines in non verbal indicators such as hesitations or repetition of words. The hesitations or repetition of words added to the strength of the participants' stories and experiences. The method of presentation was designed to respect student voice while having their stories and experiences teach. In addition, as a male researcher presenting data provided by five female participants, it is vital their words not be changed so as to respect their female voice.

Ecology - A Center

The participants identified an inner searching which knowingly or unknowingly assisted them in school. The inner searching allowed the students to develop a better understanding of themselves. The strength of a completed center started them on the road to educational success. The participants identified on several occasions the search for an understanding of their core being.

Sici: I hung out with a lot of people, did a lot of crazy things and stuff like that. But as the years went on and like in grade 9 and then going to grade 10, and 11, I met a teacher named Mrs. Book who actually made me stand out of who I really was and (made me see) the things that I was doing weren't who I was. Then in grade 11, I met a teacher named Miss French, she's been like a mother to me. She's there through everything I do. She's made me understand that the people I was friends with can still be my friends and still be the people I appreciate and care about.

Zeera: Out of our group of friends, honestly I think, like I'm the only Asian, a girl and

there's not any, like any full Native friends of ours. And that's kind of sad. I mean because it's so hard to be sometimes with some of them (because they say), "Look at that one over there." You know and just cracking out the jokes, I mean you hear it everyday. And it's just really sad and I just want to come over and you know what? Just shut up, but it's pretty sad, like everyday there's always something in, like especially when there's like you know there are lots (of Aboriginal students) in our school and they just get cut down. They always say like, "Oh look at that one there." It's just not right. It's not right at all. Because it shouldn't continue that way.

Nikita: When I was going to come into grade 9, I thought oh I'd be friends with a lot of people and we'd all get along and nobody would be left out because we were Native or because we were Asian or white or whatever. And when I got here it was totally different than what I thought. I thought oh look at, she's really pretty, she must be popular, right? And I thought oh she looks really nice and maybe I'll say hi. As soon as you say hi to somebody like that's pretty or popular in that popular group, they like snob you off and say, "Oh like what are you wearing? Oh my God you're not with that 'in-group' because you're not wearing Tommy Hilfiger or Calvin Klein or whatnot. And you don't have like the expensive clothes like everybody else." As soon as I came into grade 9 that's how they were, like totally snobbed me off. And I thought oh I don't even know you, how can you judge me? Kind of like oh you're on welfare, you're not with us because you're Native and this and that.

Sici: Well from what she [Nakita] was saying was the people that judge and stuff like that. Like honestly, I can't bash and stuff because I do it. I honestly do. Everybody does, you judge. But some of the things I don't like is the judging of certain people, certain things. I bet that a lot of people don't know what's going on and what would happen in that group of friends if one of those people, if their parents lost their job and

they had to go on welfare? Would they not be their friends anymore? Would they not be accepted? Would those things not count because they were their friends to begin with and it's just like the judging and noses that stick up. Like I have no problem, I can get along with a lot of people in this school and stuff like that, but there's a lot of people that wouldn't maybe stop and talk to me because I'm not their friend or I wasn't their friend.

Zeara: There was this one girl who started at our school this semester, and I think you guys probably might have seen her. Her name is Terri. And she's kind of a bigger girl, she has short hair. She wears a green jacket. See well when she first started, we had English in first. And she sat in the front desk in the second row. I would kind of talk to her, she would kind of try to talk to us. I got home and I was telling my auntie and my uncle, like I tell them every single thing I do. And I was telling them, you know what? I met this girl today and I just kind of said, it was really neat. She said something like, "You know I haven't gone out for lunch. Let's go for lunch." And I just thought you know what, it was a Friday. Because I said Monday, I think I would like to ask her if she'd like to go out for lunch. And then when I got to school, she had this like little note for me. And because like I found out like just things about her life that was rough, and it was sad. And she gave me this letter and it just said oh you know thank you for being there like a friend because I never thought like I never realized there was that other side of you. And I just couldn't believe it and it was like wow and so and it was really neat because I took her out for lunch that day. As soon as I walked out into the parking lot with her, everybody like what are you doing? Everybody just looked at me like oh my God, why are you with her what are you doing?

The participants searched for an inner completeness. The strength of their core started them on the path to educational success. The students' inner search created a desire

for change. The desire led to the development of volition.

Shelly: Before I came here I was expecting it to be really hard because I had two brothers in grade 12 at the time. I was in grade 8, and I'd look at their homework and like all I'd see was letters and stuff for math - and I was like oh my god! And I was so scared. And then my other brothers in grade 9 when I was in grade 8, and he could come home and be like oh there was a big fight at lunch and I'd be like aahhh! And I thought it was all fighting and hard work, but it changed when I got here.

Nikita: When I came here in grade 9, I expected that all my classes would be good and I'd get good marks and wouldn't get into trouble, and wouldn't have a baby this early in life, but everything changed and now I have almost a two year old son. I'm very proud and still in school because I had to kind of quit for a little bit and now I'm back in and I'm graduating, hopefully this year, with my teachers help. All my teachers are really supportive this year, except last year they weren't. But this year they are. And they're helping me to pass all my classes so that I can graduate this year. I can go on to better things and provide for my son a better future.

Trisha: What success means to me is working hard and just achieving your goals that you want to do through your school year and at university.

Zeara: I really have to work for it and the music business is really tough. But that's what I want to do. And so I think that would be the only way that I can succeed in life because that's the only thing I want to do. And just staying positive and happy.

Nikita: Well a couple of times I felt failure in this school. The first time when I was 18. I was just going to turn 19, but, no I was 17 and I was going to turn 18. And I was coming to the school and it was second semester, I just started and me and my family were starting to have problems. And we'd argue everyday. And what happened was eventually

I left home, like I took off from home and I moved in with a friend. And then I wouldn't show up for school, and I wouldn't care anymore because teachers were stupid and I thought they were because they were so mean. But actually I realized it was my fault because I didn't want to show up, I didn't want to make the effort and that was a big failure in my life. And what made me return in next year was that I needed my grade 12 to do anything in this world. Like you need your grade 12 to go to college, to get a good job. You need even a grade 12 to work at McDonald's.

Zeara: My mother wanted to be a singer, but she quit. I honestly don't think like she has a lot of confidence, so that I think she could actually you know go out there and do everything. Like I've never taken lessons so I don't know if I do go into the real world if I'm really like that good as you know some of the other people would think. Or you know maybe I do have to improve for more years, hopefully not. But I just want to go out there and just sing. Sing for the rest of my life. I love it so much. And it helps me in school because I believe in it so much that I just - I think okay I've got to get my school down you know. I want to be successful because if I do it, then you know - if they ask me or interview me, it's just like so how were you in school or you know stories always come up. And if they think oh she was a big failure in school or whatever, no I just want to be like oh I did my best and whatever else and I just - that's what I think and I want to carry that with me like forever and teach my kids. And I know I believe everybody else does too. You have a gift too - like always - everyone does. It's not just a few and this person only. No, it's everybody. But yea, some people haven't found it yet, but they will.

The participants discussed their desire to bear and raise children as a major element which fueled their volition and encouraged them to success in school.

Sici: My success...would be to get married to someone that is not like me, completely different. To have a family, raise them a little bit better than maybe I was raised, and the way my parents were raised. To actually have a good future set ahead for my children so that when I'm not here, they will know what it is to have a future and to be successful.

Shelly: When I'm older I want to have a child, like lots of children, I love children. I want to have lots of kids. And I want to give them a good life, not like mine. And that's about it, just give my kids a good life and my husband.

Zeara: Okay, I'm sorry - another thing I guess I didn't really expand on that - with my life too for succeeding. I do want to get married and I want to have kids. And that's another thing too. I would love to give them a life - kind of what I don't have. Because I mean, I haven't lived with my mom for like maybe almost three years.

Trisha: For me success would be having children to bring into this world.

Nikita: My success is to have another child, which is supposedly I can't do. But I already have one which that's okay. I can have another one and I think that's my success in my life is to do that and go on.

Traditional teachings discuss each person as possessing a gift which is theirs to find and nurture. The students' volition was accented by a search for their inner gift. The gift, provided by the Creator, assisted them on their success journey.

Zeara: One thing that I have to say I've succeeded in so far is music, singing. Because I believe - it was a gift and I've self-taught myself, I've never had any lessons or anything and I'm not saying that oh I'm just the best, but it's just something that I enjoy and it just makes me happy. So I think that that's what I've succeeded in.

Trisha: I think my gift is singing because I'm in the school choir. And I'm also

searching for other gifts that I have.

Sici: For gifts, no I don't think I've really found my gift. I'm not sure what it is or what it's going to be. But right now in high school, like talking to a lot of the teachers or whatever they say I have like a gift of like the butterflies what Miss Book calls it - is that I don't shut up is how she puts it. And that's a good thing in school sometimes. Like she says that when she watches me talk or move around in the class, it's like if I go and talk to somebody, they seem to get happier. If someone is sad I go and talk to them and they'll start talking to me and then I'll start joking around or do something and make them happy.

Shelly: My gift is playing ball. And it helps me in school because my dad says that if I don't do good in school then I don't play ball.

Sici: In school I think with the gift that I guess that I have with talking and being all bubbly and stuff - kind of makes my day go by a little bit better. And just makes everything flow easier. Like going to class, if we have lots of work to do or whatever, I'll be in a good mood and I'll do it and stuff like that. And with the talking is that I've noticed - I'll notice when people aren't happy and then I'll go and talk to them and they'll actually tell me what's wrong. And then I feel I can talk to them. Like okay you can do this or maybe you should do this and I don't know. Right now I think my gift is like just talking and doing a lot of listening with it, so.

Zeara: With Sici saying that about like people - I don't know that's okay that's another thing - I don't know if it's really a gift like for me. But I don't know whatever - it would be considered. Just with people I don't want to sound conceited or anything - but there are two teachers, like they've constantly always told me. Like one time I was talking to this person and she asked me something and I said, "Well no if it doesn't work out you know this is what we'll do and then whatever and whatever." And then they [teachers] just kind of looked at me and said you know, we were just talking the other day about you

know how you have a gift or like a way with people - and I was like what? And they said the way that you portray yourself towards people it's just you know, it was so weird when they said it, but it was like really touching because I didn't really realize and I was just being me, but I don't know. That just came out and I said wow. That was kind of neat. I don't know I try to treat people equally and talk to them if someone is down.

For the participants, the center of their medicine wheel was characterized by an inner searching to strengthen their core being. A search for a gift, as provided by the creator, assisted the students in creating a strong foundation to begin their journey to educational success.

East: Spiritual Realm

The spiritual realm of the medicine wheel rested in the East. The participants discussed their perceptions of spirituality and its role in their educational success. The students recognized Catholicism and Aboriginal spirituality as elements affecting their success in high school.

Nikita: The reason why I came here was they gave a tour of the school and I liked it and it's Catholic and I went to a Catholic elementary school and my family went here, so I came here.

Zeara: This school is one I think that's got a lot of different cultures here. And it's really interesting because it's not all just based on one, so. And it's Catholic, so that's good.

Nikita: My little baby and I want him to know ...we believe in what we want to and not just one thing, like Buddhism or God or the spirits or and nothing is wrong in believing in

spirits or nothing is wrong with believing in God. Because well there's nothing wrong with that because I think well my family are Christians and I'm Catholic and my sister she's a missionary. And she doesn't push her issues on me and she doesn't say you have to believe in Christianity, you can't be Catholic, you can't do this. And partly I'm still Native and I still believe in the Native culture like the sweetgrass and praying to the creator. And stuff like that.

Zeera: Spiritually - I don't know. For me, I think it's been a help because I pray every single night because - I think it just helps me get through the days and what I need to do. And I don't go to church, unfortunately, but I should start. I was actually suppose to be singing in a church, and like a month ago I was suppose to start going Tuesday nights to practices but I didn't go once. Oops! But I just - I will start going.

Sici: For the spirituality I'd say I don't know about the Catholic thing for the spirituality because I don't go to church very often. If I do it's for the Christmas and Easter. But for spirituality it's more of the Native background that I like. I like the sweet grass, I like the healings, and I like all those kinds of things.

Shelly: My spirituality is - I have no idea. I swear. I don't go to church or I don't pray. But I don't believe in anything, really. I don't know.

The participants recognized Aboriginal spirituality as an element contributing indirectly to their educational success. Elder's guidance and traditional ceremonies assisted in promoting success for the students.

Trisha: My expectations of school are that we need to respect our elders like we were taught by our family. They will teach you the way to live.

Nikita: The expectations I had are to look up to older people and for them to give you wisdom. And to teach you right from wrong, your education and stuff. The friendliness

of the school.

Sici: In my father's eyes he's white, he has no blood that is anything but white in him. Since I was little, I'm not allowed to ask questions about my grandfathers drinking. My grandfather killed himself drinking. That's the reason why my dad is ashamed. My grandfather was Native and he thinks that because his father was Native and drank that that's just what's going to happen and just if we accept that we're Native that's just going to happen to us. He's angry right now for how I'm in between the Christian religion and following the Native. He doesn't want me to be doing the Sweetgrass, be doing the healing circles. I should be going to church, I should be down on my knees praying to something that I don't believe in and that's the way he sees it and I don't want my children to be raised like that.

Trisha: I think we can pass everything if we just learn the culture no matter if you're half or full and just to pay attention to what others teach you about it.

Nikita: He [Grandfather] taught us our heritage that we [family] were Native and there was only God and only one God and there was no spirits and this and that, like some of the teachings that we have. And that you can believe in whatever you want, and he said don't be afraid to believe in what you want.

Sici: Some examples that help with the success like yesterday they had a pow-wow in the school. And I went and watched and it's kind of nice to be in a school with all the cultures and to know that you can come in and sit and watch your culture do something for you and have a presentation.

Zeara: Okay with what you were saying before like with elders, like you know looking back and telling stories and stuff, well I don't have any experience with that in my family because I mean I'm not like full Metis - so we don't do that.

The spiritual realm of the medicine wheel lies in the East. The participants

identified spirituality as an element contributing to their educational success. They spoke about Catholicism and Aboriginal spirituality not as separate entities, but as a combination which created a reality of spirituality they understood.

South: Emotional Realm

The emotional realm of the medicine wheel lies in the South. The emotional realm is characterized by emotions and feelings within the participants. The students discussed their emotions and feelings in regard to their educational success. Family and friends developed as sub-themes within the emotional realm of the medicine wheel.

Nikita: The most important person in my life is my son. He's going to be two in June. And I'm pretty proud of him. My mom was an alcoholic, my whole family were alcoholics. My grandma died - she was pushed down the stairs because she was drinking Lysol. And she cracked her head open, and she died that way. I never knew her, never got to know her at all. Which is kind of sad. So that kind of pushed me more. And then my grandpa died and that pushed me even more. Because I thought of all the deaths in our family and stuff like that.

Zeara: The most important people in my life I'd say is my Auntie Margaret and my brothers. I have parents but it's not the way it should be. I haven't lived with my mom for like maybe almost three years. And it's not like - like she's not some crazy person or anything, but she does not know how to show love and affection and that's the two most important things I think a child needs, especially as they're learning and growing. Because I mean as we all - like as we start grade 9 we're completely different people from then to now. Like totally different people because we learn and I would love to show my children all the love and affection that I can because it's so important to them as they

develop as a person.

Shelly: The most important person in my life is my dad because he took me in when I was young and that's about it.

Zeara: I used to be an only child until I was about, I don't know I think 9 or something. I don't know but and then when my brothers came along, like it just totally changed because I was baby-sitting one. Like I baby-sat him for like his whole life until the other one was born and I never really had a childhood life after that because I was always with him. And it's so unfortunate because now that I'm older I realize I try and kind of - because I'm so mean to him. Because my mom never showed me really how to you know be around him and you know talk to him, right? And I never cared if I - I never like beat him or anything but I just like I wouldn't talk to him. We'd just be sitting there watching TV and he would ask me a question and I'd say I don't know. Like and I didn't care and that's just not right.

Nikita: My family is really, really, supportive and say - go for that, go for your degree, your diploma or whatever. Get your grade 12 so that you can show your whole family that you did it. Because my family never graduated, we all were dropouts and a bunch of bums like in grade 9, grade 10. And then I'll be the first one in my family to finish grade 12 and go on to college. Our whole family, like me, my mom, my two sisters all went on to college after grade 12. And the rest of my family were just a bunch of bums and they just quit and welfare and like can you help us and this and that. And we're like go back to school. But it's mostly just my family support that gets me through this.

Sici: Right now the most important people in my life are my mom and my dad, my brother and the extended family of my boyfriend who I've gotten to know and understand.

Nikita: I moved back home and my mom said you should get your grade 12. And she did not push me, she didn't say you have to go back to school, it's your decision. You

can do whatever you want, you can even stay home and be a bum all day. And I said, okay. And I made the decision to go back.

Shelly: I know this isn't the same for everyone, but the reason I want to succeed is because of my mom and my past. Like I don't want to turn out like her, how she's doing. Because she's on welfare, you know. So I don't know, that's why I want to succeed and I know it's different for other people because if they had a bad life, they might turn out bad. But like for me it's the opposite. I want to do good because I had a bad life when I was young and I don't want to be like that. I don't want my kids to grow up like that.

Nikita: My grandfather would say, "My grandchildren, don't be like your mother and don't be like me." Because he used to be an alcoholic and that's where my mother got it from. And then he turned his life over to God and he said, "Don't forget your heritage and don't forget that we love you no matter what we do." No matter how much we drink and how much we beat you, we still love you. And it's not because we hate you, we beat you, it's because we don't know what we're doing. And so my grandchildren, don't be like that.

The participants discussed the role friends played in their high school years. The students recognized friends or attempts to make friends as an element in their educational success. These friends acted as positive and negative role models and in the end assisted in driving the participants to succeed.

Shelly: When I came to this school I expected for the whole graduating class to kind of be friends, but I was wrong. They kind of did the opposite. Everyone sort of broke up.

Trisha: My friends talk to me in school. We stay in our area and people leave us alone and we do our own thing.

Sici: When I first came here in grade 9, I was looking to not really put a name out for myself, but to be out there and totally getting along with everybody, have friends.

Zeera: When I first came here in grade 9, I loved meeting people. And I mean I was so excited I just oh you know friends, yea, you know. When you come here because you're so scared you don't really know anybody, but I mean when you meet people it just affects your life. And with friends now yes it's true. I mean you are together as one and then you break up and just because so many changes come of it, it's unfortunate because you can't do anything about it and you just, you'd never think like oh my gosh, I can't believe that person did that. But it did happen. Like my best friend before, we were best friends for like four years. She chose drugs - and now I don't talk to her at all and I miss her so much. She's totally gone like the wrong way. I mean, and there's nothing - I've tried everything, I've tried to tell her things. It was her choices and I just wish somebody could be there for her to tell her, but there's nothing I can do. But I want to be there in life with her always. But I can't. But I just - that's what I'm always going to remember in high school, especially her because we always had these plans but that's one thing I'm going to hate about high school.

Nikita: It is hard to make friend in school. In grade 9 there was lots of people but they looked at you like you couldn't be their friends. Then you meet people like you and things go alright.

Sici: I personally don't think I'm the person I want to be in grade 12. Personally I'd really like to be friends with the people that are sitting beside me, the way it was in grade 9 and 10 and 11. I chose different things to do, different people to be around. And that's fine if they don't like the people I'm around or I choose to be with, but sometimes like right now how I am right now, they don't see that. I walk around as if it doesn't matter that we're not friends and we don't hang out, but deep down inside, I still wish that in

grade 12 I could walk down the isle and talk to Brenda and Sandy as if I did in grade 9.

Zeera: Like I mean we all go through that stuff [drugs] and I just, well I mean some of it's different but it's pretty bad. And I kind of - I would do it and I'd have homework and I'd just kind of whatever who cares and it was the wrong crowd that I got with.

The emotional realm of the medicine wheel rests in the South. The participants identified family and friends as elements contributing to their educational success.

West: Physical Realm

The physical realm of the medicine wheel is in the West. The physical realm is characterized by elements, such as school atmosphere, a multicultural environment, drug and alcohol use and support programs. These factors affected the participants success in high school.

Shelly: The atmosphere in the school for me is that I'm comfortable in it because I went here for four years and I know everybody here mostly from growing up with them. And it helped me succeed because I feel comfortable and the teachers I know all the teachers and they sit and talk to you. Not talk to you like teachers, but friends.

Nikita: There's another girl named Nikita and she's in my computer class. She's a very big girl. And she wears the same clothes and I know that her family cannot afford things. And I can't afford things, I'm on welfare. I can barely make it through a month. My family has to help me through the month. They have to buy my baby's formula and his diapers every month. And I cannot afford to eat every month. That's why my mom has to buy my groceries because my rent is expensive and my phone, my lights, welfare doesn't give you enough money to survive on every month. They give you only \$500 and

something and that's plus daycare for \$275.00 - that's subsidy daycare. And I hate being on welfare, that's why I want to graduate and get off of it as soon as I can. Because when you're in this school, if you're on welfare, or you don't have the same clothes as everybody else, or you have to wear the same pair of pants everyday because you can't fit anything else, because you're getting bigger or you're too skinny. Or the same shirt because you can't afford another shirt, they judge you right away and they say "oh you stink. You smell, go away from me. You're ugly."

Zeara: But they [school] need to change and as well as getting everybody involved in the class, not just this person and that person, but everybody. It's kind of nice to kind of exchange views and make everyone feel comfortable. And that would be real important and to change I think maybe to offer more I guess kind of like programs. For like everybody to get together I guess. Like I mean I get so mad when there's so many flipping shortened days, I honestly do. Everybody thinks I'm nuts, but they say oh shortened day - oh no school here, and I think it's so dumb like with those shortened days why don't we have you know a get together and you have to come. Or you know like Pep Rallies, but more of a communicating thing.

The participants identified the multicultural environment of their school as a factor which encouraged educational success. They also identified the multicultural environment as a factor which encouraged the segregation of ethnic groups which prevented educational success.

Sici: One of the two reasons I came here was because when I was in elementary and they came they said Feehan is the greatest place, this and that and tours and all that. And the other reason was my cousin who is deceased now, she went here - she enjoyed it. She

had so - I would have to say like an amount of friends that came here and the acceptance of everybody in this school, different cultures and everything just brought me right to it.

Nikita: There is the Asian group like ESL, they all stay together. Like totally, they all stick together. They're really nice and everything, but they stick together. And then the popular groups like supposedly popular, they all stick together, they will not let anybody in, they will not say hi to you, or they will say hi to you once in a blue moon.

Sici: What I was expecting when I came here was an abundance of people that were accepting your kind and completely understanding of who you were and what you wanted to do. And that they would stand behind you for everything that you chose.

Zeara: When you first start off, you know you meet your friends and stuff and everyone gets to know each other but then as you gradually on you get into your own groups, and like I said in our group there's no Aboriginal, like full Aboriginal person. Like well there are a couple of guys but that's it.

Drug and alcohol use was identified as a major factor affecting the educational success of the participants. The students shared their stories of drug and alcohol abuse and discussed how the decision to stop using assisted them on their journey to educational success.

Zeara: Okay. I think in regards to the books and the computers and whatever. I think they have a good amount of that for people that want to succeed or whatever they need. The materials and that kind of stuff are good. But the atmosphere and the social part of some of it is just horrible. We actually had a conversation about this in class the other day with the teacher about how Feehan is going down. It is so terrible. Like the smoke rate, the drugs and the alcohol is so high and I'm not saying like we're the only school, because

there are other schools. But I mean with us being in this school and it's just so unfortunate because I mean there was a time where we all tried and oh you know it's so fun. But then we grew out of it. I mean some of us may not - I mean that's their choice and if that's whatever - people should respect that if that's what they choose to do, then whatever.

Nikita: I came back and I had a lot of struggles because I forgot everything I learned because all I thought was partying and drugs and alcohol and smoking was the thing. But then I realized that after awhile that it wasn't the big thing that I wanted in my life.

Sici: My best friend told me that she thought I was a hypocrite about some issues that were being talked about and dealt with in our relationship as friends. And she told me that she no longer wanted to talk to me or even see me anymore. That moment right there was my moment of failure and that exact day I decided that I'd walk home and I happened to walk by a house on Avenue P straight up the street, and ran into three young gentlemen who invited me into the house for a beer. And from there that's where it [drug and alcohol use] went on.

Zeera: I never failed a class ever. In the first two years I was here, I had two absences throughout the whole two years. So I never really liked skipping, I didn't like any of that because I loved school. But it kind of took me down there when I started the drugs. The only thing that I did was marijuana, but still that's bad.

Sici: They did marijuana and stuff like that, I crossed the line passed marijuana and many other lines like that. But personally I think that's one of my - one of the reasons for my downfall is that you come to a school and you're looking for all the good things. And yea there's bad things but there's a lot more pressure on the drugs and the drinking issue than there is on like sex and dating and all those kind of things like drugs and alcohol was one of my biggest pressures in this school. And I think that was my serious downfall was

giving into it and just keep giving into it.

Zeara: When I first started, I didn't really care. Like I was like I would lip off and I was kind of a brat. I just was so bad. I mean I didn't like swear and stuff. I had such an attitude. And I mean now as I go on I learned like oh my goodness, you know I never thought about grad at all in grade 9, so you know who cares? Just have fun, and of course yes, you know you go through the drinking and the drugs and the smoking and but then you learn. And that is what's a big, big, big problem in high school this day.

Sici: I don't know - the atmosphere sometimes in the school I feel the atmosphere isn't that great. I don't know how to put that. Lots of the students are really nice and stuff but there is lots of the negative things that go on in this school like people talking about other people and stuff like that. And that does bring down the atmosphere. And I agree with Zeara on the drugs and the drinking issue. One person does it and the rest follow and it's like a big domino effect that it all just kind of goes down hill. And it just keeps following one after the other and I wouldn't really want that to continue in this school because I've been successful and I'd want the people who are coming here to be as successful as I have.

Zeara: Like I don't want my kids to be starting drugs when they're in Kindergarten. Like and it's scary to even think. And like it's just how things are - I mean for instance for a car - you know back in the days when they said they could always leave their doors unlocked or the windows unlocked because nothing would happen. But now if someone had like a deck sitting there in the car for like two seconds, it would get stolen. Like why? Why is society or our atmosphere have to be like that? We should all be able to trust each other and all get along. And I think that's the only part that's unsuccessful.

The physical realm of the medicine wheel lies in the West. The participants

identified school atmosphere, a multicultural environment, drug and alcohol avoidance and support programs as elements affecting their educational success.

North: Mental Realm

The mental realm of the medicine wheel lies to the North. The mental realm is characterized by elements which assisted the participants to succeed academically. The students discussed factors which played a role in their educational success.

Zeera: The one thing I would like to say first is I think I've noticed out of this school I think there's maybe not even five, probably Aboriginal teachers. There's Miss Green, and then there's two in there, and it's like two different schools. But okay there's not too many, but still and I just and I'll come and look at that and I notice I mean maybe it's just because I don't really know and I'm with them all the time. But I've noticed that I see them, they're not really close with any other teachers. I don't know, I just see them, like I tend to see them by themselves, or with another Aboriginal teacher. Honestly I do. I don't see them with - I don't. And I mean maybe because I'm not in the staff room or whatever, but I just I don't see that. And it's I'm kind of guessing because I wonder, like oh is it because she's Native or he's Native? And it's just pretty sad. And so that just shouldn't be that way.

Shelly: I don't want to return here and be an upgrader. I don't know. I just want to graduate.

Zeera: My marks - honestly I didn't, when I first started, I didn't really care. I mean now as I go on I learned like oh my goodness, you know I never thought about grad at all in grade 9, so you know who cares? And now my main thing I want to do is graduate.

Nakita: I am more of a visual person, then you know, than somebody talking to me and

explaining it, or have to like draw pictures and stuff.

Zeera: So I can't really say that I you know I don't know any - like I mean I take Native Studies, but I honestly didn't care and I didn't want to know about it and I just - it's not important to me.

Trisha: The only special needs program that I'm still in - since Kindergarten or grade 1 is just basically you get help with the TA if there's a teacher in the room, like I need help with that.

Sici: In the elementary - in grade 1 they put me in the - I don't know what it was - it's like you were in a French School and you don't do good or whatever, so they put you in this class to help you. And then I went into grade 2 and then they kept me in it and they put me back one grade. I couldn't do stuff in French or something and in high school - in grade 10 they wanted to put me in the modified math. I didn't like that. I said no and then it was a big thing and then my parents came and said no we're not doing that. It wasn't that great of a feeling because then right now I've just passed all my maths with over 60, so I don't know why they had to put me in that.

Shelly: The only classes I took was speaking classes. I couldn't talk when I was a kid, ha, ha.

The mental realm of the medicine wheel rests in the North. The participants identified Aboriginal teachers, a graduation diploma, curriculum, and special programs as elements affecting their educational success.

Teachers

Teachers were a major element which assisted the participants on their path to educational success. The participants described stories and experiences where teachers affected them spiritually, emotionally, physically and mentally.

Spiritual. Teachers were a large part of the spiritual development for the participants in the study. A spiritual understanding assisted in educational success.

Trisha: The teachers that I've had over the years have helped me learn about my spirituality, I've got this information from the teachers mostly. And I've gotten pictures and I usually use my pictures in some of my assignments that I have, that are for Native Studies.

Zeara: With teachers I think it's a good thing for going to a Catholic School because it - Christian Ethics especially - it makes you take part in spirituality and what I need to know and what would guide me through life. And that's my answer.

Sici: And when you come to a Catholic School, like this the teachers, like she [Zeara] said with the Christian Ethics they're there to talk to you and stuff but mostly Christian Ethics teachers if you don't believe that they're talking about, they still try to respect what you're saying. And they'll try to understand, like how I talk about, when I talk about my sweet grass and healings and stuff, they listen and they think it's interesting or at least they act like it is. They're always there like to stand behind me. They say like that's good for you, way to go, and stuff like that.

Emotional. The participants identified several situations where teachers affected them emotionally on the journey to educational success.

Sici: I can't talk about half the things that I'd like to. I can talk to my art teacher with more things than I can with my mother and father.

Nikita: Mr. Hook, he was like the greatest. He always made me feel big and proud and everything and he was like the best teacher I've ever had in the whole entire time I've been here. And Miss Martin she's the best too. She'd take the time to explain why the teachers

are like this or what I'd have to do on certain assignments and stuff like that.

Zeara: She [Mrs. Book] was like a mother. Because like I said I didn't really have a mother there, so and she was and she would always say, "Oh all right, I'm going to adopt you, I'm going to adopt you and it was funny because I was just oh wow. And yes she's a different person. I mean she's a teacher, but then yet she's like a different person like a positive person like on the other side like when she teaches, she has to teach. But you know there are times when I'd be having whatever problem and I'd just - you know I'd be crying but she's always there for me I would go, "Do I look like I've been crying?" And she say, "No go like this" and I don't know kind of fixed up because I didn't want anyone to know that I was crying.

Sici: She's [Miss Lambert] one of those teachers that steps out of her working area or whatever it is and comes and talks to you as a person. Because with the beginning of high school or whatever, I had some difficulties and there were a few things where I asked her for help and if the school would have known that she came with me to go to certain places, that she could have lost her job. And the school doesn't know that she came with me and did the things that she did. But she could have lost her job doing it. And I think by that, being a teacher and actually just not being as a teacher, stepping down as a human being, as a friend, as a companion, someone you can trust is something that you need in a teacher or more than just one teacher in a school. You need more than just one person that you can trust. With a teacher who will spend the time with you who will give you the extra effort and boost of confidence to help you do what you have to do and Miss Lambert is that teacher that did that for me, so.

Zeara: And she's [Mrs. Book] inspired my life so much, and she's always saying like she watches like this Brittany Spears thing the other day and she said "oh I totally thought of you" and on and on and on. And it just puts a big smile on my face. And she just

wants to be my clothes designer and everything and she just pumps me up. She honestly does. Every time I talk to her.

Shelly: My favorite teacher is Mr. Putt. Don't ask me why, ha. He's kind of my favorite. But I like him because he always, I don't know, I've had him for two semesters straight now and I don't know, he treats me funny, I don't know. He just makes joke with me all the time. Like he's, "Okay, Trisha, what am I going to do with you?" I don't know, it's just funny. I like it when teachers make you laugh. And if they don't I just sit there and just fall asleep. But he doesn't make me think, actually sometimes he does, like he makes a lot of jokes.

Nikita: Okay. Well I think they [administration] need to change the way teachers are. Half of them, most of them are stuck up. They will not help you, they'll yell at you for asking for help or they'll just ignore you - they'll say oh I'm ignoring you. But I think that's what they mostly have to change is the teachers' attitudes towards the students. They have to look at the students not as a student, but as a person, not saying, "Oh you're younger, I'm older, I have more authority than you do." But just look at them like they're equal and not saying you're younger than me, why should I listen to you? Or why should I help you? That's what I think they have to change about the teachers. And they have to have more interactions with the students I think. Like more one-on-one, not just in front of the class and talking to the whole class, that doesn't get to other people because like Mr. Hook, like he changed part of my life. And Miss Trent, and they - most teachers need to be more open like that. And take the time to explain things and not just to ignore you and just say yea, whatever, kind of thing.

Sici: Maybe for some of the things that I would suggest for them [Administration] to change is not all the teachers do it, but some teachers, anybody that knows me know that I'm half white and half Aboriginal. Everybody who knows me knows that. And

sometimes I feel as if though I am a minority. Like they make me feel like one.

Sometimes they'll change the words of their - like they'll say something and then say, "Oh excuse me", and then they'll switch it and say that. But then right then and there when they say it, it makes me feel like the minority in there, like if they were to say the Indian, they'd say oh I'm sorry the Aboriginal. The Aboriginal person that was there, like that was an example in English. Mr. Hook said the Indian, oh I'm sorry I mean the Aboriginal. And maybe he wasn't directing it to me or maybe he decided to change it but then that point right there makes me feel like a minority that's sitting in that class for the rest of the people that know that I am - have Aboriginal in me.

Sici: I was in Miss Everett's classroom and to be honest I was tripping out real bad and she said something to me and I said whatever. And then she started to cry. And she told me to leave the class and to not come back. The next day I came back and I apologized to her and she said she didn't want my apology. So I left, came back the next day, with permission from the office to go into her classroom and they said I could. Sat down and talked to her, and we made some promises and some things like that, for me to come back into the class and for me to be accepted into school.

Zeara: I don't know if she [Mrs. Book] ever knew that I came to school like that [stoned], but, well at the time I just - especially being so close to her, I felt so bad not telling her like you know I'm kind of doing this bad thing. And I mean she doesn't need to know everything, but I just think - but I don't know she just that's what helped me, but I realize okay now what do I do with my life?

Nakita: Like this one teacher, last semester, Mr. Montreal. I asked him for help on this science thing and he took his lunch hour and he said, "Okay, I'll help you." And I went there and I did not get this one question. And he said, "Don't you get it yet? You're in grade 12, you should get it." I'm like, no I don't get it. And he's like, "What are you

stupid?" I'm like, "No I'm not stupid." He's like, " You're in grade 12, this is a grade 10 class." And I'm like, "Yea, so what? I haven't taken a grade 10 class in how many years?" He's like, "I have to eat lunch you know." And I'm like, "It is only quarter after 12" and he said, "I still have to eat lunch." I'm like, "Well go and eat your lunch, I don't care." And he said "Well fine, I'll explain it to you again." And he explained it again and I still didn't get it because it was about fractions and stuff and I don't get fractions really good, until you like show it and write it out and stuff. He's like, "You better get this otherwise I'm going to leave." I'm like, "Okay. Well go and leave and eat your lunch. I don't give a crap kind of thing." And he was like, "Fine, that's it." I'm like, "Okay, whatever you can shove this up your butt." And I walked out. And I dropped his class right the next day. And he said, "Why did you drop my class?" And I said, "Because you're a big jerk and you made me feel stupid in front of everybody." Because he said right in the middle of the hallway - "You're in grade 12, you should get this, aren't you smart enough?" And this was - everybody looked at me and I felt so small. I felt like the smallest person in the school.

Physical. The students identified stories and experiences of how teachers affected them physically in school.

Zeera: We used to go for lunch and like I went over to her [Mrs. Book's] house one time, me and another girl were suppose to go but I mean her husband was there and another teacher was there, but we went swimming in her pool. But after she said, you know, I mean we get along great, but we can't really be doing this. It's just the way society would judge it. Because she could lose her job. But it wasn't over really like 24/7. But and I just looked up to her so much. And like I said, I honestly think she has

changed my life. Like learning about health things. Like I won't - like I don't drink pop or whatever, I drink water and everything and she just like if I see her, she'll kind of check up on - like are you doing your water? Are you doing this? That's the kind of friend that I'd like to have like after I'm done high school forever because like she's more positive, like she doesn't drink alcohol lots. I don't drink anymore. I'm like me and another girl are the only ones of our friends that don't drink. And I won't. I won't anymore. And it's just like she'll say, "So what did you do this weekend? Did you drink?"

Sici: Teachers tend to pick on a lot of people and I really wish they wouldn't do that. And whether it's an Aboriginal or white, or the Chinese that are there, any color, any race or anything, I just wish they wouldn't pick on certain people, just play it as a group. And that's the way it should be as a group, not just in choosing people and making some people feel like minorities and just doing it normally as if they would and not watching the way they talk or the way they handle themselves. Because that's when you do start to feel like a minority is when they watch themselves and are careful about what they say.

Zeara: And for example like the favoring and stuff with students like with the race, for an example. Mr. Angler, he tends to have like his favorites. And I mean maybe it's just because I'm I don't know just as crazy, but I've noticed that his favorites they're all white. And like I remember when I had his class, I'd try and say little funny things or something he'd just say oh - like he wouldn't care. And I'm like oh, okay. Like but if someone were to say it, he'd just say, "Oh that's kind of funny." But they weren't brown like me. So, I don't know.

Trisha: I had Mr. Page as a teacher and my English average has always been 80's and up and for some reason, I don't know I think I was the only dark one in our class. For some reason, like every time I did my assignments I would try and you know, but he

would never give me a good mark, never. Like I would just be like what do you mean? Like - never. And I ended up with like a 72 or something and I cried because I was so mad. I figured that I had tried and I just - I went to the principal complaining because I said that's bull. But there was nothing that changed there.

Sici: For the school I'd say there were two sides. Like a good and a bad. New students might be a little intimidated by the size, the amount of people that are walking around and just the noise when you first walk in. But once you get into the classrooms, with the teachers and most things like that - lots of the teachers aren't just teachers. They're there because they want to be there and because they enjoy it so they don't make it out as just do this, do that, it's - they enjoy being there and they want to help you. And I think that with having teachers that want to help you and want to be your friend is different than if they were just there and said do this and they didn't care to talk to you or have a conversation with you. They wouldn't be as successful because when you have nice teachers, then you want to go to class, you want to do your work and you want to make them happy.

Mental. The participants identified several experiences where teachers supported them mentally on the journey to success in school.

Zeera: I've been in (Mrs. Book's) class every semester and I'm taking two of her classes twice just to redo it because she is an awesome teacher. She just - she is like a best friend to me as well, like I can tell her you know whatever, and I just - she really affected my life as well because it's changed me. I can honestly say she has changed me to become more of a positive person and I will always thank her for that.

Sici: I expect (the school) to be there to show me what to do, how to do it and when to do it. I expect them to be there to let me know about the universities about the classes,

about my choices - I expect them to stand behind me in my choices, not to try and lead me to something different that I haven't spoken about. And I also still would like them to be the teachers that they were when I first came here and still treat me with the respect they did.

Nakita: It's mostly the teachers and counselors - well some of the teachers and some of the counselors that actually help you through the school and you can talk to.

Sici: I'd have to say that teachers in this school are probably one of the - probably the best teachers I've known since I've been in the school system like they listen. Lots of them listen to you, they want to talk to you, they want to help you, and they want you to be successful. And some of them might be a little but rude and aggressive in the ways they do it, but they do get the point across and they do help you get to that point in some of those ways. And some of the ways might be a little bit aggressive towards you and might make you angry, but in the end you will realize that that's all they wanted to do was help you be successful.

Nakita: One teacher that really helped me was Mr. Hook, sorry. To most people like he was a big jerk. But to me, he was like the most nicest teacher I've ever met. I was in his English class and like I cannot get through English, no matter how hard I try. I have struggles and I almost fail every class. Every class that I've done and that one semester that I did have him, he knew my situation at home, and he knew what I was going through and my difficulties in school. He'd spend extra time, like after school, or lunch time or when I had a prep period or something to explain what he was trying to talk about and sometimes it would take two hours to explain one little thing. And he would not get mad at me. He'd explain it in the most simplest little way. Like he would not raise his voice and he would not frown at me.

Sici: Okay, from the beginning of stepping into the school, Mrs. Book has been like the

coolest teacher ever in this school. She personally in my opinion is I think she's like a teenager stuck in a woman's body, is my opinion. She totally, totally understands everything that goes on in people's lives. Like in grade 9, for an example, she spent two whole class hours talking to my class about sex, drugs and drinking and all those kind of things, just to get a point across to us. And she did. And I don't know she's like one of the pretty cool teachers, like she listens to you. She doesn't look down on you as if she's there to teach you, she looks at you as if you're there, you want to learn and she's there to help you.

Nakita: And he would push me, like where I needed to be pushed to do my homework, he would push. And he would know how much to push and what buttons to push to make me do that and he would discipline me when I needed discipline. Like say I arrived late or I didn't do my homework he would be like "okay you stay after school and you stay here and you do it." And I would do it. And that's how I got like an 80 some in his class. That one semester, which I was very proud of, because I earned it. He pushed me to do that. So that's what I think a teacher should be.

Zeara: Mrs. Book as well, like I said she totally has changed me and I think from the person I am today, I think that has a bigger affect on her. And like totally because just everything that I do I just it all - I don't know she just totally changed me. And I just want to say this one thing. Like her classes are so fun. Like they're not easy, you have to do the work and she does teach you a lot of great things, but I think a lot of people think oh it's going to be easy and they just don't really take that. You know they don't take it seriously. But I mean she would help you in her class always. And this one time, I have to say this. It was in grade 10, I think, but our group was cooking and I hid in the cupboard and then Trisha told her to come over because the cupboard, so she came over and I shot out of the cupboard. I don't know and I got the class cracked up, like little

things like that would make our class fun.

Sici: What I was expecting when I came here was that the teachers would be half decent to you and respect you as a person and not just as a student.

Nakita: When I was pregnant, I had heart problems and the baby was in stress. And it was ready to die. So they said I had to have bed rest and that's what - I gave all my presentations to the teachers and they all passed me because I earned it they said. Like I said thank you for passing me, and they were like you did not pass just because of me, I didn't give you the mark. You earned it. And that's what made me come back the next year. And I'm still struggling, but I'm slowly getting through it.

The participants unanimously identified teachers as the single most important factor contributing to their educational success. Teachers affected the spiritual, emotional, physical and mental realms of the students.

Summary

This study analyzed factors contributing to the success of Aboriginal high school students. An adaptation of the traditional medicine wheel offered a culturally appropriate framework for organizing the data. The medicine wheel was comprised of seven crucial elements. The elements included the ecological center and volition at the core. The spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental realms surrounded the core while, the last crucial element, teachers, completed the medicine wheel as a final ring surrounding everything. Within the four realms of the medicine wheel, several sub-themes developed which assisted the participants in achieving educational success.

All the factors outline the needs of Aboriginal high school students which must be addressed in order for educational success to follow. The data collected from the

participants created the themes depicted in the medicine wheel. Although the realms are discussed as separate entities, the data collected often fit into more than one realm. This was representative of the non-static nature of the medicine wheel; it was ever changing and adapting to its present reality.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

This chapter will discuss three major topics. The first will explain the rationale for studying success in high school. The second will review the original research questions of this study and offer the summative results based on the data collected from the sharing circles with Aboriginal high school students, my interpretations and the relevant literature. The sharing circle methodology was effective for gathering data. The amount of data collected in the study supports this assertion. The data, interpretations and literature will be analyzed in the framework of a medicine wheel model. The medicine wheel is comprised of seven crucial elements. The elements include the ecological center and volition at the core. The spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental realms surrounded the core while, the last crucial element, teachers, completes the medicine wheel as a final ring surrounding everything. The discussion will also identify several sub-themes which develop from the data collected in the sharing circles. The final section of this discussion will mention other themes which may be of interest as suggestions for further research.

Why study success?

The conventional educational system evolved from a European industrial factory model which mass produced product and discard product which did not meet factory specifications. Many students do not fit into the system designed by earlier educators. The purpose of this study on success factors in education was not to minimize the negative elements so aptly addressed in literature by researchers and educators; rather the purpose of the study was to highlight the positive factors with a solution based philosophy driving educational transformation. Educators concerned about Aboriginal education should be looking for factors which are working rather than continuing to focus solely on failure for students in high school.

Researchers have attempted to create change in education by criticizing schools. For the most part, their attempts to bring about change have seen minimal results. The policies developed out of their research have changed education, but not in favour of the marginalized, especially Aboriginal youth. The changes brought about by educators cause a lateral movement, but there is no real forward progression. Mackay and Myles (1995) summarize the challenge these researchers encounter in studying factors of Aboriginal student success and failure in school:

Although there was often consensus among stakeholders on key contributory factors in Native student dropouts, the salient factors were almost invariably intertwined with other factors. It was therefore impossible to identify a particular factor or cluster of factors and recommend appropriate remedial steps in school. (p.163)

The cluster of factors leading to failure is too difficult to unravel. For this reason a study focusing on factors leading to the success for Aboriginal high school students allowed the potential for researchers to see education from a renewed point of view.

Review of the Research Questions

This study focused on factors which contributed to the educational success of Aboriginal high school students. The three research questions which framed this study were:

1. What are the factors which foster success for Aboriginal high school students?
2. Why do researchers consistently focus on the factors causing failure of Aboriginal students in school?
3. How can factors contributing to the success of Aboriginal high school students assist educators in restructuring their environment to meet the needs of all students?

The supplementary questions which served to guide the research are as follows:

1. How do parents and family assist students in becoming successful in school?
2. How can classroom teachers promote Aboriginal students' success in high school?
3. What attributes create a positive school environment which promote Aboriginal student success in high school?
4. How do Aboriginal students define success?

The results discussed in this chapter represented the researcher's overview of the participants' stories and experiences, the interpretations of the researcher, and the relevant literature available regarding Aboriginal student success and failure. The discussion covers a broad range of topics, but in no way is designed to represent all the stories and experiences of Aboriginal students in high school.

The Role of Voice

The study was built on the foundation of Aboriginal high school students' voices. Individually, the voices are but a whisper in the wind. As a collective, the voices offered support and strength for each other. The strength of the collective increased into a whirlwind where change was possible. The participants were not merely sharing stories of interest, they were sharing their inner thoughts, feelings and experiences. James and Mannette (2000), quoting Mohanty (1993), describe the voice as "the sort of voice one comes to have as the result of one's location-both as an individual and as part of collectives" (p.87). Their stories and experiences provided data for the study and allowed them to express their thoughts regarding school and life. The opportunity to share in the circles left the students with a good feeling. Trisha discussed her feelings about the study. "My last words for this is that it was kind of good to be in this study for the last couple of months that we had school. I really liked this study."

Zeara described how the sharing circles allowed her to open up in a new way. The ability to share with others strengthened her personality:

Yea, I think it was really interesting because it is the first time that I was ever in something like this but it made me really open up to like maybe some things that were inside that should have gotten out and some things that I wanted to share. And I was glad to be a part of it. And also it just made me feel kind of stronger about like - I think I admitted before like about being part Metis. And so it was really fun and interesting and really emotional and crying last time, but it was good to do. So thank you very much.

Sici valued the chance to share with her peers and valued the respect shown toward her in the sharing circles. She felt it renewed her spirit as an Aboriginal woman:

I don't know it was really nice just to come in here and be able to talk about like - I don't get to talk about this kind of stuff in my family or with my friends and stuff like that because it's something that you don't really talk about. And it was just kind of nice to come out and be able to say how I felt and what I'm like and how I would like things to be and just to be able to sit here and talk with everybody was really nice.

Shelly provided a concrete example of the power found in sharing circles. She

described how the discussions led her to renew her relationship with her mother:

The circles made me think a lot harder about my family. And actually I talked to my mom the other day about some of this stuff, and I never do - I can never talk to my family or friends about this, but I did. And it just made me feel good. So it helped me.

The expression of voice is a necessary step toward emancipation (Noel, 1994). The participants in the study discovered through their voice as they reflected in the sharing circles. The strength of the collective reflection and expression of voice allowed the students to question more fully their educational success and environment.

Ecology - A Center

Ecology is the center of the medicine wheel and acts as a catalyst to achieve interconnectedness (Cajete 1994). The Webster's New World Dictionary (1995) defined ecology as "the branch of biology that deals with the relations between living organisms and their environment" (p.189). An Aboriginal definition expands this definition to include ancestors as an integral element in balancing the living organisms and their environment. Educators use ecology as the fuel to balance the medicine wheel. Ecology encompasses all realms of life: spiritual, emotional, physical and mental:

Each of these four constructs can be visualized as a medicine wheel continuum to show the interconnectedness and simultaneousness of events and conditions. Frank Black Elk (1982), describes interconnectedness as an encompassing relatedness between everything - stars, two legged, bears, cougars, rivers, flowers, planets. (Calliou, 1995: p. 50)

The participants, in an attempt to discover their center, searched for an understanding of their environment in relation to themselves. Cajete (1994) elaborated on the concept of center in traditional tribal education:

Learning happens of its own accord, if the individual has learned how to relate with his/her inner center and the natural world. Learning about one's own nature and acting in accord with that understanding was a preconditioning that prepared the individual for deep learning. (p. 211)

General interaction between the participants and their peers caused much of the self examination. The participants' ability to question their surroundings and examine their centers demonstrated they were preconditioned and prepared for the deeper learning Cajete (1994) described as endogenous and part of tribal education.

The students demonstrated an ability to examine their inner self in their stories and experiences. Sici, looking inward, contemplated the path she chose to follow in school and described how it affected her relationship with friends. "I personally don't think I'm the person I want to be in grade 12. Personally I'd really like to be friends with the people that are sitting beside me, the way it was in grade 9, 10 and 11."

Zeara, discussing what success means to her, shared her secret for success in school and other areas of her life. "Success to me I think - two important things that you'd have to have is being positive and being happy. Because I always think if you're down, you're never going to get anything out of it, so why not be happy?" The ability to self-examine allowed Sici and Zeara to strengthen the core of their being. A strong core provided the foundation for success.

The participants' search for a inner peace involved questioning such concepts as prejudice within themselves and the peers around them. Zeara, in her story, searched for an understanding of the divisions found within her peer group. "Out of our group of friends...I'm the only Asian, a girl and there's not any, like any full Native friends of ours. And that's kind of sad."

Nikita described her experiences with racism and classism. She discussed how it helped strengthen her inner being:

When I was going to come into grade 9, I thought I'd be friends with a lot of people and we'd all get along and nobody would be left out because we were Native or because we were Asian or white or whatever. And when I got here it was totally different than what I thought. As soon as you say hi to somebody like that's pretty or popular in that popular group, they like snob you off.

Sici expanded on the role judgment played during her high school years:

Things I don't like is the judging of certain people, certain things. I bet that a lot of people don't know what's going on and what would happen in that group of friends if one of those people, if their parents lost their job and they had to go on welfare? Would they not be their friends? Would they not be accepted?

Her ability to reflect on her conscience allowed her to strengthen the core of her being.

The participants strengthened the core of their being when questioning their surroundings and the tenants which create their environment . The ability to address concepts such as prejudice and classism served to strengthen their inner being and provided the will to succeed.

Nurturing a Gift

Part of the search for a strong center involved finding the gift or talent provided by the Creator. The gift, if discovered and nurtured, assisted in challenging the roadblocks of life. Bopp et al. (1984) discussed the relationship between the medicine wheel and our gifts:

The medicine wheel can show us not only as we are now, but also as we could be if we were to develop the potential gifts the Creator has deposited within us. Many of these hidden potentialities might never be developed if we did not somehow discover and nurture them. (p. 33)

Not all people have realized the gift they possess. Individuals endure a lifetime and never discover their gift. What made these students special was they searched for their gifts and as their gifts became a reality, those gifts supported them on their journey in school.

Nikita talked about the gift of having children as a motivating factor for success in life and schooling. "[To me] success is to have another child, which is supposedly I can't do.

But I already have one which is okay. I can have another one and I think that's my success in my life".

Sici's experience in life and search for a complete center exposed a potential gift

which helped her succeed in life and education. "Success to me would be to get out of this school and into university, either Saskatchewan and or Regina. I want to be a teacher. I would love to become a teacher, that would be my success."

Zeara described singing as an element contributing indirectly to her success in school:

One thing that I have to say I've succeeded in so far is music, singing. Because I believe - it was a gift and I've self-taught myself, I've never had any lessons or anything and I'm not saying that oh I'm just the best, but it's just something that I enjoy and it just makes me happy.

Trisha also felt singing was a special gift which made her feel good and contributed to her success. "I think mine is singing because I'm in the school choir. And I'm also searching for other gifts." Shelly's gift motivated her to continue in school. "My gift is playing ball. And it helps me in school because my dad says that if I don't do good in school then I don't play ball."

The ecological center of the medicine wheel bound the spiritual, emotional, physical and mental realms together from the core of the framework. The core and four realms were supported by a gift identified from within our being. The search for a stronger core supported the development of volition.

The Development of Volition

The strength of the ecological center allowed the participants to develop volition as part of that center. Bopp et al. (1984) defined volition and described its role in the medicine wheel:

We can use our volition (ie. our will) to help us develop the four aspects of our nature. Volition is the force that helps us make decisions and then act to carry out those decisions. Since volition is a primary force in developing all of our human potentialities, it is place at the center of the medicine wheel.
(p.14)

The stories and experiences of the participants identified a volition which drove them to

succeed in school. Their volition was characterized by personal goals in life and education.

Nikita described her goals and the expectations she had for the school to assist in reaching the goals. "I expect to graduate and have the teachers help me graduate because I want to graduate so I can go college. I expect to have a good job later in life. This school is going to help me do that". Nikita's volition assisted her in returning to school after she had left for a period of time to have a child. "I'm very proud I'm still in school because I had to kind of quit for a little bit and now I'm back in and I'm graduating, hopefully this year, with my teachers' help."

Shelly discussed how she realized at one point in high school that she needed to take control of her educational path and work harder to achieve success. The desire to change came from within:

I've changed a lot since grade 9 because I used to not care about anything, like I think I had 30 absences in each class, three years straight and then finally I'm like oh I need to graduate and then I picked up my shoes and now I'm graduating.

Volition helped her to make the changes necessary to be successful in high school. Trisha added to Shelly's assessment of what was needed to be successful in school. "What success means to me is working hard and just achieving your goals that you want to do through your school year and at university."

For Zeera, the desire to attain her goal of musical success provided the tools which drove her to succeed in education:

And my main thing is I want to graduate, but my main, main, main dream I want to become a singer. I want to be a pop singer and I want to tour around the world and I want to have concerts and I want to have interviews and the whole bit. And I want to do that so bad!

The development of volition caused the participants to examine themselves in relation to the world. This examination led to the self-realization or decision to change the direction of their lives. Volition or will, once sparked, took over and assisted the students in

attaining success in education. Nikita described how she faced this transformation as she struggled to remain in school:

I wouldn't show up for school, and I wouldn't care anymore because teachers were stupid and I thought they were because they were so mean. But actually I realized it was my fault because I didn't want to show up, I didn't want to make the effort and that was a big failure in my life. And what made me return in next year was that I needed my grade 12 to do anything in this world. Like you need your grade 12 to go to college, to get a good job. You need even a grade 12 to work at McDonald's.

All the participants, knowingly or not, had volition guiding them through their educational journey. Internal motivation is necessary for students to succeed in school. The difficulty lies in teaching students to develop their volition. The participants discovered the secret. Their educational success was a testament to their volition.

Volition- Children

The participants expressed their desire to bear children in future years. The desire to bear children was related to educational success as it encouraged a drive to succeed which affected the participants performance in school. The participants also described child rearing in comparison to their personal experiences; they wanted a better upbringing for their children than they experienced. For Sici, education was part of this equation. "Success would be to get married to someone that is not like me, but completely different. To have a family, raise them a little bit better than maybe I was raised, and the way parents were raised."

Shelly echoed Sici's desire for children as a factor which helped develop volition and encouraged success:

When I'm older I want to have a child, like lots of children, I love children. I want to have lots of kids. And I want to give them a good life, not like mine. And that's about it, just give me kids, a good life and my husband.

Nikita, a mother of one, offered a different point of view when discussing child rearing in the present rather than the future. Although she discussed child rearing in the present, its

affect on her educational success was as meaningful as for the other participants. "I want for my son not to drink and I want him to know that our family used to be alcoholics and they're recovering from that."

When asked what contributed to her success in school, one of Nikita's answers captured the role children played in the educational success of the participants. "Mostly its just our family support that gets me through this. Through every day and my son that looks at me every morning and says "mommy I love you and that's about it." The desire to bear children in future years was a major factor in the development of volition which in turn encouraged educational success for the students.

Volition was a critical element in the medicine wheel. Bopp et al. (1984) discussed the role volition played in bringing balance and harmony into the lives of the participants:

All human beings have the capacity to grow and change. The four aspects of our nature (the physical, the mental, the emotional, and the spiritual) can be developed when we have a vision of what is possible and when we use our volition to change our actions and our attitudes so that they will be closer to our vision of a happy, healthy human being. (Bopp et al., 1984, p. 16)

Encouraging all students to develop and work to achieve goals provides them with a foundation necessary for success in life and education. The participants had a focus in life. It was not necessarily the goal which developed volition and encouraged educational success; it was the fact they had a goal which drove them to seek a better life for themselves through education.

East: Spiritual Realm - Catholic and Aboriginal Spirituality

In the medicine wheel framework, the spiritual realm lies to the East. The spiritual realm examined the role Catholicism and Aboriginal spirituality played in the educational success of Aboriginal high school students.

Catholic Spirituality

Educators believed Catholic schools offered an enhanced environment for the educational success of Aboriginal students. Citing Groome (1998), Bempechat (1998) maintained Catholic school's spiritual foundation assisted students in realizing educational success:

Catholic schools have built their reputation for academic distinction by adhering to a relatively straightforward doctrine of excellence, rooted in profound faith and a covenant to both educate and elevate the poor and disadvantaged. (P.55)

Bempechat (1998) further identified Catholic schools as particularly successful when teaching ethnic minorities. "I believe that the overall pedagogical philosophy of Catholic schools is one that leads children to believe in their intellectual abilities and strive for academic excellence (p.92)."

The participants recognized Catholic spirituality as playing a limited role in their education. Nikita explained why she chose to attend this particular high school. "The reason why I came here was they gave a tour and I liked it and it's Catholic and I went to a Catholic elementary school and my family went here." However, in their discussions the participants did not identify Catholic spirituality specifically as affecting their educational success. Spirituality was discussed as a general concept. Nikita's discussion around the raising of her son emphasized spirituality as a combination of values:

My little baby. I want him to know his heritage because he's half Litnue and he's Cree and he's French, and I want him to know everything. I want him to know his language and that we're not all different, we're all the same inside.

Zeara echoed Nikita's thoughts when discussing her reasons for attending this high school. "This school is one I think that's got a lot of different cultures here. And it's really interesting because it's not all just based on one [culture]. An it's Catholic, so that's good." Although Catholic spirituality was recognized as a factor in the educational success of the participants, it was not identified as a major element.

Aboriginal Spirituality

Aboriginal spirituality as a factor in the participants' educational success was also evident, but not separate from Catholic spirituality. This was evident in the discussion around elders. A key component of Aboriginal spirituality is the role elders play in the education of children. Hoover (1998) believes elders played a major role in the success of Aboriginal students in high school. " 'We made extensive community contacts and discovered the many resources that the community can offer students', and, 'Elders are now involved in classroom instruction (p.30).'" Nikita discussed the role her grandfather played in her life and consequently her education:

He [grandfather] taught us our heritage that we were Native and there was only God and only one God and there was no spirits and this and that, like some of the teachings that we have. And that you can believe in whatever you want, and he said don't be afraid to believe in what you want.

The students in this study recognized the role elders played in their high school success, but did not define elders as traditionally done in Aboriginal culture. They discussed elders as a general term for all those older than themselves. Zeara shared her beliefs regarding elders in school. "I look up to older people and for them to give you wisdom. And to teach you right from wrong, your education and stuff. The friendliness of the school".

Some of the participants are a product of Aboriginal and Catholic spirituality and culture. This type of upbringing caused them to redefine spirituality as a combination of Aboriginal and Catholic values and ideals. Sici's personal life experience shed some light on how the redefinition of spirituality occurred in her life:

As I said when I was little, there were no questions, I'm white - that's the way it was left. Most of the things that I've learned about my culture has been through - I'm dating a native individual and right now hopefully it continues and that I'd love to be with him for the rest of my life. They're not just how my dad says 'white' and it's not the way I want to be. He's angry right now for how I'm in between the Christian religion and following the Native. He doesn't want me to be doing the Sweetgrass, be doing the healing circles. I should be going to church, I should be down on my knees praying to something that I don't believe in and that's the way he sees it and I don't want my children to be raised like that.

Aboriginal spirituality is characterized by ceremonies and renewal celebrations. Hoover (1998) draws a strong relationship between Aboriginal students' inability to learn when their culture is neglected in their educational environment. "Research has shown that the constant neglect of culture blended with educational curriculum negatively affects students and how they view themselves as learners within the larger society (p.28)." Culture plays a major role in developing self-identity and self-esteem. These are two factors necessary for success in school. McInerney et al. (1997), studying Navajo Indian children and success in schools, finds a "cultural conflict between the values and goals of schooling and those of the Navajo community predispose Navajo children to drop-out (p.2)." The conflict between Aboriginal and Western worldviews creates roadblocks in the search for success in school. Sici explained how ceremonies and celebrations within her school bridged the gap between Aboriginal and Western worldviews and improved her chance of success in school as they helped her feel comfortable in school. She explained how success was obtained when she was able to observe a pow-wow at the school:

Some examples that help with the success like yesterday they had a pow-wow in the school. And I went and watched and it's kind of nice to be in a school with all the cultures and to know that you can come in and sit and watch your culture do something for you and have a presentation.

The participants redefined and developed a new age of spiritual understanding. Their understanding of spirituality was a result of their present reality in a school which acknowledged and respected both Catholic and Aboriginal spirituality. The spiritual realm examines the role Catholic and Aboriginal spirituality played in encouraging educational success for Aboriginal high school students. In the medicine wheel, Catholicism and Aboriginal spirituality lie to the East.

South: Emotional Realm - Family, Friends and Self-Identity

In the medicine wheel framework, the emotional realm was in the South. Family, friends and the development of self-identity were emotional factors which contributed to the educational success of Aboriginal high school students. McInerney et al. (1997) summarized the importance of relationships and family in school for Aboriginal students. "It is clear from the interviews that the most important influence on school motivation was the family. Teachers were rated second most important, and peers were the third (p.14)." Phelan et al. (1992) echoed McInerney et al. (1997) in a discussion of student relationships in school. "Students say that they like classrooms where they feel they know the teacher and the other students (p.696)." Family and friends were valuable factors for encouraging educational success in Aboriginal high school students.

Family

Family involvement in school increased Aboriginal students' chances for educational success. Melnechenko and Horsman (1998) identified family influence as one of the major factors contributing to the success of Aboriginal student at school. "Educators have come to know that there is a positive correlation between success at school and positive family influence, support, and relationships (p.9)." This was certainly the case for Patrick G., a Navajo education officer, McInerney et al. (1997) interviewed regarding Navajo students' success in school. "I think success to a lot of Navajo students means being able to help their family. Success is more of a group thing than the typical Anglo (p.7)." Aboriginal students agreed family played an important role in fostering success in school. "The students in this study dwelt on the importance of family. They [students] felt that their immediate family provided a forum by which they could share their concerns and accomplishments" (Melnechenko & Horsman, 1998, p.20). Without

family involvement, Aboriginal students were less likely to succeed in school.

Although researchers and Aboriginal students agreed family played an important role in the educational success of students, educators must be careful not to view family as the only factor needed for student success in school. Mackay & Myles (1995) warn us of a misguided notion regarding the role parents should play in school:

Many educators used the presence or absence of parental support to explain a student's decision to remain at or drop out of school. 'In homes where graduation and education is stressed and valued by parents, kids graduate; otherwise they rarely do.' Such an apparently cogent explanation can enormously comfort educators because it places responsibility for a student's behaviour firmly with the parents and releases the school system from both blame and remedial action. (p.166)

Educators must realize the important, yet limited, role parents play in fostering success for Aboriginal students in schools. Placing too large an onus on parents in education would not bring balance to the medicine wheel of Aboriginal education, it would perpetuate disharmony.

The extended family members of the participants acted as positive and inadvertently as negative role models. The positive and negative examples set by the family members guided the participants to succeed in school. As they observed their family succeed or fail, the participants were able to search for their own path in life. The participants were asked what information about yourself would you like to share with the others that will help them and me to better understand who you are? Their answers introduced the topic of family.

"The most important person to me is my dad because he took me in when I was young and that's about it" (Shelly).

"The most important person in my life is my son. He's going to be two in June. And I'm pretty proud of him"(Nikita).

"Right now the most important people in my life are my mom and my dad, my brother and the extended family of my boyfriend who I've gotten to know and understand"(Sici).

"The most important people in my life I'd say is my Auntie Margaret and my

brothers because they raised me. I have parents but it's not the way it should be" (Zeara).

"The most important people in my life are my sister and my brother" (Trisha).

The relationship the participants had with their family influenced directly or indirectly their success in high school. Zeara expanded on the relationship she had with her mother and discussed how this influenced growth and learning:

I haven't lived with my mom for like maybe almost three years. She does not know how to show love and affection and that's the two most important things I think a child needs, especially as they're learning and growing. I would love to show my children all the love and affection that I can because it's so important to them as they develop as a person.

Nikita discussed how her family encouraged her to continue in school and overcome the obstacles placed in front of her:

They're [family] really, really, supportive and say - go for your degree, your diploma or whatever. Get your grade 12 so that you can show your whole family that you did it. Because my family never graduated, we all were dropouts and a bunch of bums like in grade 9, grade 10.

Nikita, continuing, described a specific time she dropped out of school and was encouraged by her mother to return. "After living on my own, I moved back home and my mom said you should get your grade 12. And she did not push me, she didn't say you have to go back to school, it's your decision."

The families of the participants led by positive example and also by negative example. What made these students special was their ability to see what their family was going through and rather than fall into the cycle, they decided to stop it and stay in school. Shelly explained how her family's negative example encouraged her to remain in school. "I know this isn't the same for everyone, but the reason I want to succeed is because of my mom and my past. Like I don't want to turn out like her, how she's doing. Because she's on welfare, you know."

Nikita described how her grandfather's message urged her to be successful in

school and life:

My childhood, it was different. Like my mom drank my whole life, as far as I can remember. And then she quit about ten, or thirteen years ago when my grandpa died, and that was the hardest thing for our family to go through. My grandpa would say, "My grandchildren, don't be like your mother" and "Don't be like me". Because he used to be an alcoholic and that's where my mother got it from.

The tragic death of her grandmother and passing of her grandfather encouraged Nikita to break the cycle of her families past by going to school:

My grandma died - she was pushed down the stairs because she was drinking Lysol. And she cracked her head open, and she died that way. I never knew her, never got to know her at all. Which is kind of sad. So that kind of pushed me [to complete school] more. And then my grandpa died and that pushed me even more.

Family was a major factor in promoting educational success for the participants. The participants families led by positive and negative example.

Friends

The participants did not separate family and friends as two discrete entities. Many of their friends were part of their extended family. Sici described this overlap in a discussion of high school peers as a family. "Sometimes I wish that the school wouldn't be separated so that they actually could be a big family and say they are a family." The participants identified friends as a factor affecting their educational success. In McInerney et al.'s (1997) study, Navajo students identified peers relationships as having a direct effect on their success in school. "In general, it was thought that students who were located within a peer group which espoused the importance of learning at school were advantaged in their own motivation to learn and to succeed at school (p.10)." Aboriginal students were influenced both positively and negatively by their peer support in school.

High school was an exciting time because you met many new people and potential friends. Zeara described her experiences when beginning high school and making new

friends:

When I first came here in grade 9, I loved meeting people so I was - like actually Shelly and Sici were like my first - like two of the first people that I met here. And I mean I was so excited I just oh you know friends, yea, you know.

Although friends were identified as important in school, there was only one story where friends provided positive encouragement to continue and succeed in school:

I only get four hours of sleep every night and I am still coming to school on time, which is kind of amazing for me because I'm mostly a big lazy bum in the morning. And I like have to get my friend to drag me out of bed. She is the baby-sitter that I got after I took him out of daycare.

The participants discussed many examples where the negative experiences of their friends provided motivation to succeed in school. Sici described how her choice of friends led her on the path to failure until she decided, with the help of a specific teacher, to change the direction of her life:

When I first came here in grade 9, I was looking to not really put a name out for myself, but to be out there and totally getting along with everybody, have friends. Be the person that I thought I was in grade 9, and sure I had a lot of friends, I hung out with a lot of people, did a lot of crazy things and stuff like that. But as the years went on and like in grade 9 and then going to grade 10, and 11, I met a teacher named Miss Book who actually made me stand out of who I really was and the things that I was doing weren't who I was.

Sici followed her friends for awhile, until she realized what she needed to accomplish in order to succeed in school. Zeara shared a very similar story of experimentation with drugs and partying with her new friends until she realized it was leading her to failure in school. "Like I mean we all go through that stuff [drugs] and I just, well I mean some of it's different but it's pretty bad. And I kind of - I would [get stoned] and I'd have homework and I'd just kind of whatever who cares and it was the wrong crowd that I got with."

Zeara continued to describe the story of her best friend and agonized over how to get her friend to realize she needed to change in order to succeed in life:

My best friend before, we were best friends for like four years. She chose drugs - and now I don't talk to her at all and I miss her so much. She's

totally gone like the wrong way. I mean, and there's nothing - I've tried everything, I've tried to tell her things...Before I used to think like okay, you know I hate high school because look what it does, look what it does. But it wasn't that, it was her choices and I just wish somebody could be there for her to tell her, but there's nothing I can do. But I want to be there in life with her always. But I can't. But I just - that's what I'm always going to remember in high school, especially her because we always had these plans but that's one thing I'm going to hate about high school.

The path the best friend chose was an example to Zeara. It was clear in her description she did not want to follow the same path to failure. Friends were a factor contributing to the success of the participants. They encouraged the participants to succeed by being a positive or negative role model.

Development of Self-Identity

The development of identity played a role in the participant's journey to success. As discussed earlier, the participants came from a varied Aboriginal background. Each participant was at a different level as far as their acceptance of being Aboriginal. Nikita and Trisha were proud First Nation women. Sici was a proud Metis woman, while Zeara and Shelly were just beginning to accept their Aboriginal ancestry. The development of self-identity within the participants was a factor in their schooling. Zeara best described the development of identity as she struggled with recognizing herself as Metis:

I was always ashamed and scared to say that I was - I had Metis in me. And I'm sorry, as harsh as it sounds, but I just - just because - well I was always scared in what people thought, just the way society views Aboriginal people sometimes, it's just bad. And it's sad because they're not all the same, but it just seems they always have to pick and pick on them...I did this one performance [singing], it was my first live gig. And it was a bar - and I did it and these two people came up to me after and they said "are you aboriginal?" And I'm like 'no'. And they said are you sure you're not Aboriginal? I was like no, and they go okay. And like I've thought about that. Like a year later and I thought you know, why did I say no? I lied to them when I said no. That's just because I was ashamed and I just thought I don't know. It was just stupid of me when I look back. I should have said yes, but I didn't.

The development of identity was a factor contributing to the educational success of

Aboriginal high school students. Although not all the participants are comfortable with their ethnic background, they were beginning to understand their past and questioned their heritage. An internal examination of this type was a critical step in achieving success. The participants cared enough about themselves to look internally and attempt to understand their past.

The participants identified family, friends and the development of identity as factors contributing to their success in high school. In the medicine wheel framework these elements are found in the emotional realm.

West: Physical Realm - Multiculturalism, Support Programs,
and Drug and Alcohol Avoidance

In the medicine wheel framework, the physical realm rested in the West. The physical realm examined three elements identified by the participants, multiculturalism, support programs, and drug and alcohol avoidance, which contributed to their educational success.

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism in schools is often seen as a positive step toward equity for all students. The participants viewed multiculturalism policies as both positive and negative in their educational success. One of the reasons Sici was attracted to her high school was due to the acceptance of different cultures. “One of the reasons I came here was the acceptance of everybody in this school, different cultures and everything just brought me right to it.” Zeara echoed Sici’s thoughts on a multicultural school. “This school is one I think that’s got a lot of different cultures here. And it’s really interesting because it’s not all just based on one [culture].” The fact students recognized there are more than one

culture in the school did not mean respect was attached to each ethnic group. Sici hinted at the breakdown of multiculturalism as a positive factor in a discussion of expectations for her high school. "What I was expecting when I came here [school] was an abundance of people that were accepting your kind [Metis] and completely understanding of who you were and what you wanted to do." The reality was multiculturalism, for the participants, was yet another tool for separating students into groups. Nikita shared her perspective on cultural separation:

There is the Asian group like ESL, they all stay together. Like totally, they all stick together. They're really nice and everything, but they stick together. And then the popular groups like supposedly popular, they all stick together, they will not let anybody in, they will not say hi to you, or they will say hi to you once in a blue moon.

Zeara elaborated on the cultural separations within the school and how it affected

Aboriginal students, particularly First Nation students:

When you first start off, you know you meet your friends and stuff and everyone gets to know each other but then as you gradually on you get into your own groups, and like I said in our group there's no Aboriginal, like full Aboriginal person. Like well there are a couple of guys but that's it.

Multiculturalism was valued by the participants, yet the cultural differences led to the creation of groups with Aboriginal youth being marginalized. The participants recognition and attempts to challenge this reality are factors contributing to their educational success.

Multiculturalism, as a tool for achieving equity, often falls short of its objective.

Multicultural initiatives often serve to perpetuate differences among racial groups as the participants have discovered in their high school.

Support Programs

Support through programs outside and within the school assisted the participants to succeed in high school. Nikita talked about her financial needs as provided by social services. "I can barely make it through a month. My family has to help me through the

month. I hate being on welfare, that's why I want to graduate and get off of it as soon as I can." Although Nikita did not want to be labeled welfare recipient, she knew it was a necessary step for her to graduate. In a discussion of how her son motivated her to complete school, Nikita touched on the role welfare plays in her educational success:

Yea, because I want a better life for him. Because I want him to say oh my mom was on welfare all her life, she didn't do anything with her life, she didn't go to school. I don't want him to say that. If I die tomorrow, I want him to say 'Yea she was going to school and she looked after me by herself, my dad did not have nothing to do with it. She did it all by herself.' And that's what I want him to say when I die. I'm so proud of her. Yea, that's all.

The students identified counseling as a major support within the school. The support of the counselors helped the participants to deal with very personal issues, such as sexual and physical abuse. The support allowed the participants to heal their hearts and concentrate on the academic requirements of school. Trisha discussed the support she received in school support programs:

Last year I had a lot of difficulties with my parents because my parents aren't together no more. And when I was younger I kind of had a little bit of difficulties of being abused and what it has done to me through this school, and going to school, has caused me not to trust most people. In grade 12 right now there's only so much people I will get close to right now.

Nikita discussed her abusive childhood and identified the school counselor as someone who helped her to face the abuse:

I was raped three times [tears] and she [mother] said it was my fault every single time. And she said I shouldn't have been looking for her. That was when I was six years old. She was missing for two days. And I said I will go look for her, I know one of her friends and he said she is not here. I said well I am going home now. [Pause] And he grabbed me and he raped me. [tears] And I was only six years old. At school I talk to Miss Bruce about it.

The participants were faced with many potential roadblocks on their journey toward educational success. Abuse, for some, was one they will deal with for the rest of their lives. The school support programs provided the participants with tools to deal with their

abuse.

Drug and Alcohol Avoidance

The participants identified drug and alcohol use as a factor affecting their educational success. The participants talked about the availability of drugs and alcohol and its effects on all students. They discussed specifically their experiences with drugs and alcohol and how their decision to stop using helped them to succeed in school. Zeara elaborated on her journey through drug and alcohol use in school:

You know you go through the drinking and the drugs and the smoking and but then you learn. I never failed a class ever. In the first two years I was here, I had two absences throughout the whole two years. So I never really liked skipping, I didn't like any of that because I loved school. But it kind of took me down there when I started the drugs. The only thing that I did was marijuana, but still that's bad. And that is what's a big, big, big, problem in high school this day.

Nikita told a very similar story being away from school and using drugs and alcohol. "I had a lot of struggles because I forgot everything I learned. All I thought about was partying and drugs and alcohol and smoking. But then I realized that after awhile that it wasn't the big thing that I wanted in my life." Sici identified drugs and alcohol as factors which pushed her toward failure in school. She tells a touching story of her journey into and out of the world of drugs and alcohol. Her decision to stop using drugs and alcohol was a major factor for her educational success:

When you get into high school you do your thing, you do your drinking, you do your drugs or whatever, for a lot of people it came maybe earlier for them, like in grade 9 and ten and stuff. Mine came in at like the grade 11 level and not everybody else was (like) that. And I think that's one of the reasons I had such a bad failure was because I was the only one kind of that was really hard, like how I was into it. They [participants] did marijuana and stuff like that, I crossed the line passed marijuana and many other lines like that. Drugs and alcohol was one of my biggest pressures in this school. And I think that was my serious downfall was giving into it and just keep giving into it. I think the drugs are a serious, serious, downfall for a lot of people in this school. And like Zeara said the people who aren't graduating, none of my friends who still do it are graduating. So I think that has to do with a lot of that. The drugs and stuff like that.

Drug and alcohol use provided a challenge for the participants. The lure of substance

abuse or self medication proves to be too much for many students. The development of volition assisted the participants in leaving drugs and alcohol in their past. If the participants had not made the decision to stop using substances, they recognize that they would not have experienced educational success.

The participants identified multiculturalism, support programs, and drug and alcohol avoidance as factors contributing to their success in high school. In the medicine wheel framework these elements are found in the physical realm to the West.

North: Mental Realm - Aboriginal Teachers, Diploma, and Curriculum

In the medicine wheel framework, the mental realm is in the North. The participants identified Aboriginal teachers, attaining a diploma, and a curriculum which engages the interest of students as factors which fostered their educational success.

Aboriginal Teachers

Aboriginal teachers played an important role in the educational success of Aboriginal youth. MacKay and Myles (1995), in a discussion of Aboriginal retention and dropout rates, identified Native teachers and/or assistants as an important success factor for Aboriginal students in high school:

Schools in which Native students enjoy a high rate of success are those with principals who actively promote strategies for maximizing the academic success of all their students. The principals of such schools have successfully recruited Native teachers and/or assistants. (p.174)

The participants recognized the need for more Aboriginal teachers in the school, but did not associate one specific Aboriginal teacher as contributing to their success. Zeara, in a discussion of the need for more Aboriginal teachers, identified a deeper problem within the school:

The one thing I would like to say first is I think I've noticed out of this

school I think there's maybe not even five, probably Aboriginal teachers. There's Miss Shaw, and then there's two in there, and it's like two different schools. But okay there's not too many. I've noticed that I see them, they're not really close with any other teachers. I don't know, I just see them, like I tend to see them by themselves, or with another Aboriginal teacher. Honestly I do. I don't see them with - I don't. And I mean maybe because I'm not in the staff room or whatever, but I just I don't see that. And it's I'm kind of guessing because I wonder, like oh is it because she's native or he's native? And it's just pretty sad. And so that just shouldn't be that way.

The participants were very perceptive. Zeara identified a problem within the school. The irony was her discussion about the teacher groups paralleled that of student grouping which served to marginalize both Aboriginal students and teachers.

St. Denis, Bouvier, and Battiste (1998) in a report on Aboriginal teachers expands on teacher marginalization within schools. In a discussion of Aboriginal teachers' relationship with colleagues, the researchers found "having more than one Aboriginal teacher on a staff is a valued experience for Aboriginal teachers. It enabled them to feel connected, relaxed and confirmed" (p.49). The need for comfort in the school parallels that of Aboriginal students in the classroom. The Aboriginal teachers experienced racism from other teachers within their schools. "Despite the well meaning and the goodheartedness of some colleagues, teachers feel that racism remains invisible to them, manifested in their negative comments about Aboriginal students, families or other teachers" (p. 52). The researchers' findings led to a recommendation for school boards to provide networking opportunities among Aboriginal teachers.

Graduation Diploma

The participants set educational goals in school. One of the goals was to graduate and receive a diploma. The diploma was a concrete factor which pushed these students to succeed in high school. The realization that a diploma was a sign of success did not come automatically to the participants. Zeara's story of her early high school years was a sign

of this naivete:

My marks - honestly I didn't care, when I first started, I didn't really care. Like I was like I would lip off and I was kind of a brat. I just was so bad. I mean I didn't like swear and stuff, but they'd say something and I'd just be, oh I had such an attitude. And I mean now as I go on I learned like oh my goodness, you know I never thought about grad at all in grade 9.

Shelly was much more concise when discussing a diploma as a factor which pushed her to complete high school. "I just don't want to return here and be an upgrader. I don't know. I just want to graduate". The drive to graduate and have the opportunity to gain employment is a factor helping these participants to succeed in school.

Engaging Curriculum

The participants identified curriculum as a factor contributing to their educational success. For the students, curriculum was not only course content, but it included different learning and teaching styles. Nikita talked about her learning style and the dedication of a teacher as two elements which helped her to grasp the course content and succeed in English:

One teacher that really helped me was Mr. Klein. To most people like he was a big jerk. But to me, he was like the most nicest teacher I've ever met. I was in his English class and like I cannot get through English, no matter how hard I try. I have struggles and I almost fail every class. Every class that I've done and that one semester that I did have him, he knew my situation at home, and he knew what I was going through and my difficulties in school. And I'm more of a visual person, then you know, than somebody talking to me and explaining it, or have to like draw pictures and stuff. So he's spend extra time, like after school, or lunch time or when I had a prep period or something to explain what he was trying to talk about and sometimes it would take two hours to explain one little thing. And he would not get mad at me.

The curriculum the students discussed did not revolve necessarily around Aboriginal content. In fact, Zeara was very clear that the Native Studies course available to her was not a factor contributing to her success in high school. "Like I mean I take Native Studies, but I honestly didn't care and I didn't want to know about it and I just - it's not important to me". Natriello, Pallas, McDill, and McPartland (1990) maintained one method for

building necessary peer relationships in schools was to “develop ways to promote peer networks which provided support and attachment (p.190).” Students helping students will foster success at school. The curriculum Zeara identified supported these researcher’s position on student communication:

I think with learning about Shakespeare and like 1920 wars and stuff like, well we don't need to know it. That's really junk, it's junk. Like it is, it's junk, I mean - okay it's interesting to do, but it's junk. I think that I wish they [school] would do more about communicating. Because that's what a lot of people need. But the communication is the biggest thing and that needs to be put into the school system more because I think people need to learn about it.

The mental realm rested in the North of the medicine wheel. The presence of Aboriginal teachers, the lure of a diploma, and an engaging curriculum contributed to the success of Aboriginal high school students.

Teachers - A Necessity for Success

Strong healthy relationships built on trust and mutual respect contributed to the educational success of Aboriginal students. The strength of the student/teacher relationship often dictated the level of success the student had in school. Melnechenko and Horsman (1998) studied factors which contributed to Aboriginal student success in school in grades six to nine. They maintained “relationship-building is a prerequisite to a positive classroom environment (p.12).” In their study the students identified healthy student/teacher relationships as a factor contributing to their success in school:

According to middle years students the best teachers are strong classroom leaders who are friendlier and more understanding and less uncertain, dissatisfied, and critical than most teachers. Setting standards and maintaining control while allowing students responsibility and freedom to learn are also essential. (p.12)

Teachers surround the spiritual, emotional, physical and mental realms of the medicine wheel. The participants identified teachers as the most important factor contributing to their educational success. Teachers who acknowledged the spiritual,

emotional, physical and mental realms of a students' being were significant people in the educational success of the participants. The data collected from the participants which related to teachers are examined from the four realms of the medicine wheel: spiritual, emotional, physical and mental. The importance students put to each these realms as contributing to their success suggests significance of the medicine wheel and these factors to them.

Spiritual Support

Spiritual guidance was essential in the journey to educational success. The teachers at this Catholic high school provided spiritual guidance for the participants. Bempechat (1998) analyzed why a strong student/teacher relationship, as seen in a Catholic school, promoted educational success:

Indeed, it could be that, in their deliberate attentions to students' academic, spiritual, and personal growth (Bryk et al., 1993), teachers in Catholic high schools may provide the kinds of feedback that encourage positive attitudes about learning. (p.93)

Trisha discussed the spiritual effect teachers had on her in high school. "The teachers that I've had over the years have helped me learn about my spirituality, I've got this information from the teachers mostly." Zeara outlined the role Christian Ethics teachers played in her spiritual development. "With teachers I think it's a good thing for going to a Catholic School because it - Christian Ethics especially - it makes you take part in spirituality and what I need to know and what would guide me through life." Sici agreed with Zeara that Christian Ethics teachers played an important role in their spiritual development and discussed the importance of tolerance to Aboriginal spirituality within her school:

And when you come to a Catholic School, like this the teachers, like she [Zeara] said with the Christian Ethics they're there to talk to you and stuff but mostly Christian Ethics teachers if you don't believe that they're talking about, they still try to respect what you're saying. And they'll try to

understand, like how I talk about, when I talk about my sweet grass and healings and stuff, they listen and they think it's interesting or at least they act like it is. They're always there like to stand behind me. They say like that's good for you, way to go, and stuff like that.

Teachers played a major role in the spiritual development of the participants. The tolerance exhibited by the teachers allowed the students to explore the Aboriginal culture in a Catholic setting. An educational atmosphere of this type encouraged educational success.

Emotional Support

Teachers provided extensive emotional support for the participants. Phelan, Davidson, and Cao (1992) turned directly to students in seeking information on the importance of student/teacher relationships. The interviews revealed a definite need for positive student/teacher relationships in school:

Students want to feel connected personally to their teachers...they want to know that teachers have thoughts, feelings, and experiences that both enliven and go beyond the academic content of the classroom. (p.699)

The students identified many positive examples of teachers supporting them emotionally in their educational success. Interestingly, when the participants described positive examples of teacher support, the situations were compared to negative teacher situations. In comparing the positive against the negative attitudes, the participants highlighted the need for more positive teacher support. For this reason it was necessary to report and comment on, not only the positive examples, but also the negative teacher situations.

Sici talked about the support received from teachers throughout her high school years. "In grade 11, I met a teacher named Miss French. She's been like a mother to me. She's there through everything I do. She's made me understand that the people I was friends with can still be my friends and still be the people I appreciate and care about." Sici continued, "I can talk to my art teacher with more things than I can with my mother and father." This was an amazing compliment for a teacher. It shows the level of trust

and admiration the participants possessed for them. As with any trusting relationship, the admiration did not develop overnight. Zeara outlined the development of a supportive relationship between her and a teacher:

Grade 9, when I just started, I was kind of leery, I remember being in her [Mrs. Book] class, she'd always come, and "Zeara can you go in the hall". And I'd go out there and she would just say you know you're talking. And I just - I would kind of lip off and you know whatever, and I mean I wasn't overly bad, like I never got sent to the office or anything. But I just got talks and I just kind of listened and got to know her and she just - honestly she was like a mother. Because like I said I didn't really have a mother there, so and she was and she would always say to oh all right I'm going to adopt you, I'm going to adopt you and it was just funny because I was just oh wow. And yes she's a different person. I mean she's a teacher, but then yet she's like a different person like a positive person like on the other side like when she teaches, she has to teach. But you know there are times when I'd be having whatever problem and I'd just - you know I'd be crying but she's always there for me and I would go. And it's funny because I mean do I look like I've been crying? And she say no go like this, and I don't know kind of fixed up because I didn't want anyone to know that.

The relationship was built on trust and respect. The emotional support provided by the teachers allowed Zeara and Sici to succeed in school. Nikita described the support she received from teachers and counselors in school:

Mr. Hook, he was like the greatest. He always made me feel big and proud and everything and he was like the best teacher I've ever had in the whole entire time I've been here. And Miss Bruce, she's the best too. She'd take the time to explain why the teachers are like this or what I'd have to do on certain assignments and stuff like that.

Zeara spoke about the positive emotional support she received from a teacher:

And she's inspired my life so much, and she's always saying like she watches like this Brittany Spears thing the other day and she said, "Oh I totally thought of you" and on and on and on. And it just puts a big smile on my face. And she just wants to be my clothes designer and everything and she just pumps me up. She honestly does. Every time I talk to her.

The participants needed lots of emotional support from their teachers in order to succeed in school. It was critical that the teachers earn the trust of the participants before attempting to push the student toward success. Trust is earned over time when mutual respect exists.

Sici described a teacher who earned her trust and provided emotional support:

The beginning of high school or whatever, I had some difficulties and there were a few things where I asked her [Mrs. Pelton] for help and if the school would have known that she came with me to go to certain places, that she could have lost her job. And I think by that, being a teacher and actually just not being as a teacher, stepping down as a human being, as a friend, as a companion, someone you can trust is something that you need in a teacher or more than just one teacher in a school. You need more than just one person that you can trust.

Nikita told a story of a teacher's emotional support which helped promote educational success. As with the other examples of positive teacher support, the teacher promoted confidence within the student:

Mr. Hook, every like no matter if I'm down or if I'm happy, every single day no matter what he'll say hello Sunshine. And that will brighten my day. Like if I'm totally ticked off at a teacher or somebody ticked me off or something happened during that day, it will be like, "Hello Sunshine" and that will make my day. That will make me happy again. And that's what I liked about Mr. Hook, he always made me smile.

Sici told an interesting story about the emotional support and expectations provided by a teacher. She was having difficulty in school and on the path to failure. The experience pushed Sici to work harder in school and left a lasting impression on her:

I can remember the point of where I said this was it and that's where it ends. I was in Miss Y's classroom and to be honest I was tripping out real bad and she said something to me and I said whatever. And then she started to cry. And she told me to leave the class and to not come back. The next day I came back and I apologized to her and she said she didn't want my apology. So I left, came back the next day, with permission from the office to go into her classroom. Sat down and talked to her, and we made some promises and some things like that, for me to come back into the class and for me to be accepted into school. And from the third day of when I believe it was right after the Christmas break I came back and she said this is how it's going to be and I said yea. And that's how it was and that's right where it picked up is when I said that's it. No more of this. And that's where it ended.

Trust and respect in a teacher/student relationship was a necessity for achieving success in the classroom. The participants identified emotional support from teacher as a major factor in their educational success.

Physical Support

Physical safety was identified by the participants as a basic need in school. If a student experienced a situation where their safety was compromised at some time in their life, they became very conscious of the level of safety in their environment. For many Aboriginal people physical safety was a concern due to past abuse. Trisha discussed the emotional and physical support provided within the school. She felt teachers and counselors allowed her to deal with her abuse and work to be successful in school. "Miss Slim and Miss Bruce have been there for me since like grade 10 or grade 11. They are the ones I discuss most of my problems to." It was a necessity to heal the heart before academics could be a priority. This is a valuable lesson to educators.

Physical health was a concern for Zeara. She talked about the support she received from a teacher which encouraged her to live a healthy and nutritious life:

I don't drink pop or whatever, I drink water and everything and she [Mrs. Book] just like if I see her, she'll kind of check up on - like are you doing you water? Are you doing this? And today it's kind of funny because I wanted an ice-cream drumstick. But I went up to her and I asked her 'I'm like would it be bad if I ate that today. She says, well what else are you going to eat? And I said fruit. No, it will be okay. And it was just so cute, just little things like that. And that's the kind of friend that I'd like to have like after I'm done high school forever because like she's more positive, like she doesn't drink alcohol lots. I don't drink anymore.

The teacher was a positive role model for Zeara and this translated into educational success. The teacher not only modeled appropriate behaviour, but she cared enough about Zeara to follow up and checked if she was living a healthy lifestyle.

Mental Support

The participants expected academic support from teachers. Low teacher expectations of Aboriginal students effected the level of educational success students experience. All too often, teacher expectations of Aboriginal students was low and as a

result the students failed in school:

There was a general feeling expressed that Anglo teachers, in particular, expected little of their Navajo students and limited the students' opportunities, therefore, to engage in challenging work at a level that might be expected of Anglo students. (McInerney et al., 1997, p.10)

Dingman et al. (1995), following Bowker (1993) supported the need to challenge low teacher expectations of Aboriginal students.:

Obviously, the academic pipeline for the American Indian people is leaking badly. Low teacher expectations and counseling of Indian students into vocationally-orientated curricula have been identified as among the factors contributing to this attrition. (p.10)

Cleary and Peacock (1998), from their research, added to the discussion of low teacher expectations for Aboriginal students:

Teachers talked about the fear of getting children's hopes up when experience had taught them that dreams are often smashed. But teachers should not cut off possibilities on that basis, nor should they be discouraged when their hard work does not pay off on graduation. (p.220)

Melnechenko and Horsman (1998), also identified low teacher expectations for Aboriginal youth as a roadblock for success at school:

Aboriginal students find themselves removed from the mainstream and segregated into remedial programs in disproportionately large numbers. Too often these remedial classes lack hallmarks of a challenging, engaging curriculum. (p.9)

The participants revealed high teacher expectations as a factor encouraging their success in school. Their stories and experiences supported the need for teachers to commit to expectations for Aboriginal students. Sici talked about her expectations of teachers when she first came to the school:

I expect them [teachers] to be there to show me what to do, how to do it and when to do it. I expect them to be there to let me know about the universities about the classes, about my choices - I expect them to stand behind me in my choices, not to try and lead me to something different that I haven't spoken about.

Nikita agreed teachers and counselors provided mental support. "It's mostly the teachers and counselors - well some of the teachers and some of the counselors that actually help you through the school." Career planning was an important factor leading to success for

the participants.

The participants identified many examples of mental support provided by teachers. The support shown by the teachers played a major role in their success as students. The mental and emotional support was evident in Zeara's desire to take multiple classes from the same teacher:

And I also met Mrs. Book as I've been in her class every semester and I'm taking two of her classes twice just to redo it because she is an awesome teacher. She is like a best friend to me. I can honestly say she has changed me to become more of a positive person and I will always thank her for that.

Sici talked about the different feelings teachers caused in her . Even if she did not always agree with them, she realized teachers were doing their part in helping her to succeed:

I'd have to say that teachers in this school are probably one of the - probably the best teachers I've known since I've been in the school system. Like they listen. Lots of them listen to you, they want to talk to you, they want to help you, and they want you to be successful. And some of them might be a little but rude and aggressive in the ways they do it, but they do get the point across and they do help you get to that point in some of those ways. And some of the ways might be a little bit aggressive towards you and might make you angry, but in the end you will realize that that's all they wanted to do was help you be successful.

Shelly identified humour as an important characteristic for a teacher wishing to who encourage success. She talked about her favorite teacher and how he used humor to promote success:

My favorite teacher is Mr. Putt. Don't ask me why, ha. He's kind of my favorite. But I like him because he always, I don't know, I've had him for two semesters straight now and I don't know, he treats me funny, I don't know. He just makes joke with me all the time. Like he's "Okay, Shelly, what am I going to do with you?" I don't know, it's just funny. I like it when teachers make you laugh. And if they don't I just sit there and just fall asleep. But he doesn't make me think, actually sometimes he does, like he makes a lot of jokes.

Only after the sharing circle discussion, Shelly realized the humor helped her to learn in the teacher's class. Humour was a valuable tool utilized by the teacher to gain her interest.

Zeara shared an experience when it was critical a teacher possessed a sense of humor. The sense of humor helped Zeara to enjoy the class and succeed in school:

Her [Mrs. Pelton] classes are so fun. Like they're not easy, you have to do the work and she does teach you a lot of great things, but I think a lot of people think oh it's going to be easy and they just don't really take that. You know they don't take it seriously. But I mean she would help you in her class always. And this one time, I have to say this. It was in grade 10, I think but our group was cooking and I hid in the cupboard and then Trisha told her to come over to the cupboard. So she came over and I shot out of the cupboard. I don't know and I got the class cracked up, like little things like that would make our class fun.

Although the teacher possessed a sense of humor, Zeera was clear the teacher had academic expectations for her in the class.

Sici discussed the emotional connection she had with a teacher and how it helped support her academically:

Okay, from the beginning of stepping into the school, Miss Book has been like the coolest teacher ever in this school. She personally in my opinion is I think she's like a teenager stuck in a woman's body, is my opinion. She totally, totally understands everything that goes on in people's lives.

The academic expectations were essential for the success of the participants. There was, however, room for flexibility within the expectations. Nikita discussed how the flexibility of teachers, during the birth of her child, helped her to pass her classes:

I gave all my presentations to the teachers and they all passed me because I earned it. I said thank you for passing me, and they were like, "You did not pass just because of me, I didn't give you the mark. You earned it." And that's what made me come back the next year.

The participants described many examples of positive support they received from their teachers. The teachers approached the students with a genuine sense of caring and recognized conventional methods of teaching did not achieve success for the students. The teachers allowed their hearts to guide them in their teaching and it made all the difference for the participants.

Lack of Teacher Support

Teachers provided much support for the participants in the study. Unfortunately there were stories of teachers who did more to ensure failure than success. Bempechat

(1998), quoting Weiner and Graham (1982), discussed the ability children have to recognize a lack of support from teachers. "Children as young as five years of age can infer a teacher's belief about the cause of success or failure from his emotional reaction to a student's performance (p.53)." The students pinpointed times in school where the teachers were not as supportive as possible. The participants felt the negative examples of teachers in school needed to be examined in the same section as the positive examples. The purpose of the comparison was to further emphasize the positive examples which assist Aboriginal students in succeeding in school.

When asked what the high school administration could change to help more students be successful in high school, Nikita answered:

Okay. Well I think they need to change the way teachers are. Half of them, most of them are stuck up. They will not help you, they'll yell at you for asking for help or they'll just ignore you - they'll say oh I'm ignoring you. But I think that's what they mostly have to change is the teachers' attitudes towards the students. They have to have more interactions with the students I think. Like more one-on-one, not just in front of the class and talking to the whole class.

The participants described specific stories of negative teacher support in school. These stories and experiences often centered around a racist theme. Sici described an incident where a teacher called undue attention to her because she was Aboriginal. The interaction made her feel uncomfortable in the class. Although the act was one of political correctness and not specific racism, race was still at the center of the discussion. Sici was singled out as the Aboriginal student in the class:

Sometimes I feel as if though I am a minority. Like they [teachers] make me feel like one. Sometimes they'll change the words. Like they'll say something and then say "oh excuse me", and then they'll switch it and say that. But then right then and there when they say it, it makes me feel like the minority in there, like if they were to say the Indian, they'd say oh I'm sorry the Aboriginal. That was an example in English. Mr. Hook said the Indian, oh I'm sorry I mean the Aboriginal. And maybe he wasn't directing it to me or maybe he decided to change it but then that point right there makes me feel like a minority that's sitting in that class for the rest of the people that know that I am - have Aboriginal in me.

The racism is at times overt, but some instances are more blatant. Zeera talked about what she believed to be a race favoritism in one of her classes:

And for example like the favoring and stuff with students like with the race, for an example. Mr. Canton, he tends to have like his favorites. And I mean maybe it's just because I'm I don't know just as crazy, but I've noticed that his favorites they're all white. And like I remember when I had his class, I'd try and say little funny things or something he's just say oh - like he wouldn't care. And I'm like oh, okay. Like but if something were to say it, he'd just say "oh that's kind of funny." But they weren't brown like me. So, I don't know.

Nikita talked about an experience with her math teacher which eventually caused her to drop the class. The description of the teacher was in stark contrast to the earlier description of the supportive teacher who pushed her to succeed:

I asked him for help on this science thing and he took his lunch hour and he said, "Okay, I'll help you." And I went there and I did not get this one question. And he said, "Don't you get it yet? You're in grade 12, you should get it."

The negativity of the teacher led Nikita to drop the class and prevented her from experiencing success.

Trisha described a situation in one of her classes where she felt the color of her skin played a role in the teachers attitude toward her:

I had Mr. Page as a teacher and my English average has always been 80's and up and for some reason, I don't know like I think I was the only dark one in our class. Every time I do my assignments I would try and you know, but he would never give me a good mark, never. Like I would just be like what do you mean? Like - never. And I ended up with like a 72 or something and I cried because I was so mad. I figured that I had tried and I just - I went to the principal complaining because I said that's bull. Like I just, but there was nothing that changed there.

Teachers can be very supportive toward Aboriginal students. Unfortunately, there are also situations where teachers do more to prevent educational success than help it. The participants were very clear about their experiences from both types of teachers. Their ability to recognize the difference helped them to focus on the positive teachers, while ignoring the negative, and achieving educational success.

Summary

Weesageechak represents the folly of perception and greed, the white man's colonization of our people and the continued effect it has on the education of our children. Weesageechak has upset the balance of Aboriginal education. Through European assimilation, Aboriginal education has been challenged to survive in the conventional structure of the educational system. History has shown Aboriginal students failing in school. In keeping with the stories told by elders, one way to overcome the hold of Weesageechak was in following the teaching of the medicine wheel. Balancing the four realms of life, spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental, returned harmony to Aboriginal education. The medicine wheel worked well as a framework for organizing factors which foster educational success for Aboriginal high school students.

Ecology, the center of the medicine wheel, acted as the bond holding the four realms of life together (Cajete 1994). The ecological center is comprised of a volition to succeed in life. It was characterized by a special gift each person possessed. The spiritual realm, to the East, focused on the participants' redefinition of spirituality as a factor fostering success in education. Spirituality was a combination of both Catholic and Aboriginal teachings which students lived within. The emotional realm, to the South, discussed family, friends, and the development of self-identity as factors in the educational success of students. Parents and family members encourage success by supporting the students in school and providing a positive role model outside of school. The physical realm, to the West, examined the role multiculturalism, drug and alcohol avoidance and support programs played in creating a successful education for students. The mental realm, to the North, examined Aboriginal teachers, a grade twelve diploma, and curriculum as factors in promoting educational success for students. Teachers acted as the last necessary element needed for Aboriginal youth to achieve success in school. In the

medicine wheel teachers were symbolized as the band surrounding the rest of the elements. Without the strength of the band, all would fall apart and there would be no success for Aboriginal youth.

The inclusion of only five female students as participants on one hand limited the scope of the study. On the other hand, the participants offered much valuable information regarding issues facing Aboriginal women in education. They discussed the role family, children and their welfare played in their lives at present and in the future. Although these elements are identified as factors leading to their educational success, they also serve to limit their opportunities in society. While I did not intend to study Aboriginal women, the data gathered offered interesting directions for future study. The participants defined success as more than a grade twelve diploma. Children, family and friends are signifiers and motivators for success in life. Breaking the cycle of dysfunction in the family is also a strong motivator for success.

The medicine wheel is a mechanism available for educators as a guide of what factors lead to success for Aboriginal students. In comparing the factors perpetuating failure and factors encouraging success, educators, administrators and parents must work together to accommodate and accentuate the factors which lead to success for Aboriginal youth. The following list offers an illustrative summary of the factors contributing to success or failure in this study and in the literature.

Factors Encouraging Success

- a new understanding of Spirituality
- family involvement
- friends
- development of self-identity
- multicultural environment
- support programs
- drug and alcohol avoidance
- Aboriginal teachers
- grade twelve diploma
- relevant curriculum
- supportive and flexible teachers
- nurturing a gift

Factors Perpetuating Failure

- contrasting worldviews
- lack of parental involvement
- lack of an engaging curriculum
- schools are goal oriented
- lack of cultural content in schools
- low teacher expectations
- drug and alcohol use
- loss of Native language instruction
- placement into alternative programs
- lack of career counseling
- lack of teacher flexibility

Administrators who adopt the list of success factors as a base for programs will take the first steps toward creating a more positive school environment for Aboriginal high school students.

Educators have been caught in the cycle of examining factors contributing to failure. In looking at a comparison of the two sets of factors, they are quite similar. This may be the reason researchers have focused almost solely on factors leading to failure as opposed to examining success stories. With a small, but crucial, change in the point of view educators can approach educational change from a new perspective. Unfortunately, the students cannot make the changes necessary in the educational system. Their job was to share their stories and experiences and to guide educators in the transformation of Aboriginal education. The work now lies in the hands of educators, parents and administrators.

Suggestions for Further Research

The data provided in the sharing circles outlined concrete factors which encouraged Aboriginal students to succeed in school. The sharing circle methodology uncovered a vast amount of data from the participants. In addition, there were topics uncovered which were beyond the scope of this study. The following are offered as suggestions for further research.

1. The factors presented in the medicine wheel framework are not exclusive to Aboriginal students. In fact, the literature points to many common traits leading to success for all students. Cleary and Peacock (1998), focusing on intrinsic motivation, support the notion that there are common traits leading to success for all students:

Although the methods that we will advocate in the rest of this chapter are methods teachers reported that worked well with American Indian children, because they are based on intrinsic human motivation, they will work well with all children. (p.205)

McInerney et al. (1997), focusing on Navajo and Western values in education, support the belief there are many common traits leading to educational success for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. “While in previous research, issues of cultural differences between Navajo and Western values towards formal education have been the focus, the present research shows that compatibility on many fundamental educational issues actually exists (p.13).” There is much to be learned from identifying the factors which foster educational success for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Rather than looking for negative aspects and difference, why not focus on common traits?

2. Conduct a study of teachers which examines the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers within a school with the hope of improving working relationships between the two groups.

3. Investigate and cross reference factors which contribute to male and female Aboriginal high school student success.

4. Design and implement educational programs which promote the factors leading to success as identified by Aboriginal students.
5. Examine student perceptions of spirituality and its effect on their education.
6. Prepare and implement a program which directs and monitors teachers to be more supportive of marginalized students.

EPILOGUE

What did I accomplish in this study? How is this going to help students in the future? What did the study teach me? These are some of the questions I consider as I write this last section of a thesis documenting a journey which began when I taught the students at Joe Duquette High School. In the end I believe the study revealed two important findings, one more important than the other.

The first finding is a framework which outlines factors contributing to the success of female Aboriginal students in high school. My hope is that the factors contributing to their success will assist other Aboriginal students in attaining success in school. This means teachers, administrators and parents need to implement programs which develop the factors outlined in the medicine wheel framework. Although the framework of success factors is key to the study, another finding stands out in my mind as the most important.

In reflection, I realize the process of the sharing circles was important in the study. The students embraced the opportunity to share their stories and experiences. They wanted to be heard. I believe all students, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal would benefit academically and emotionally from the opportunity to share their stories and experiences throughout their high school years. Educators, administrators, and parents should create more opportunities where all students can share and learn from one another. Perhaps running these sharing circles is the role elders need to play in the education of our children. Perhaps this realization was the elders' purpose in telling the story of Weesageechak and the educational system. Now I understand.

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APPENDIX A

MODERATOR'S INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION PROMPTS SHARING CIRCLE #1

INTRODUCTION

My name is Darryl Bazylak. I am an Aboriginal educator in the Saskatoon Catholic School Division. Most of my teaching experience has been with students who are defined as at risk, meaning they do not fit into the educational system and often do not succeed in school. Aboriginal students make up a large part of this at risk student group. I believe educators need to look at the school system for changes to help these students, particularly Aboriginal students.

Researchers have focused on why students fail and educators have attempted to make changes using the information they discovered. This technique has shown still more failure of Aboriginal students in school. Therefore, I think it is important to focus on success rather than failure. To do this I have designed the sharing circles with Aboriginal students who have been successful in school. In our discussions we will focus specifically on factors which contribute to your success in school. I hope the information will be used by the school system to change the way students, specifically Aboriginal students, are taught.

Before we begin our discussion, I would like to provide you with specific information on the process which we will use today. A sharing circle will be used to gather information. The sharing circles will be tape recorded so that I can refer back to the discussion when I write my thesis. My role as moderator will be to ask questions which will focus the discussion. I may also respectfully interject with another question to gain more clarity of your thought. You are free to answer the questions as you choose. The recording secretary will take notes which record who is speaking and the main points of the discussion as we move along. Please say exactly what you think in the manner that suits you. Remember, everyone's thoughts are important. You are here to share your stories and experiences.

There are several guidelines we need to follow while sharing in our circle.

1. Respect what others are saying.
2. If you are holding the rock you can talk. If you are not please listen until your turn comes.
3. Please keep in mind it is our responsibility to maintain the confidentiality of the sharing circle discussion which takes place here today.

General Questions

1. What information about yourself would you like to share with others that will help them and me to understand you better?
2. Tell us how you decided to come to E.D. Feehan Catholic High School and what eventually became your reasons for coming here?
3. What expectations did you have for this school?
4. What expectations did you have for yourself?
5. How do you define 'success' in school and where in your life have you experienced

that?

Focus Questions

1. You have all experienced success in school. What do you think contributes to success for Aboriginal students like yourselves?
2. What are the characteristics of an effective/good teacher? What do they demand of you?
3. If you were talking to the administration of E.D. Feehan, what would you tell them to change in order to achieve more success for yourself or other Aboriginal students?
4. Think of a time when you felt failure in school was upon you. Tell us about that time and what motivated you to continue or return to school?
5. Think about your most successful class. What is it in the class that brings you such success?
6. During your elementary, middle school or high school years, have you chosen or been placed in a remedial, alternate, or enriched program? When? What kind of program? For how long? Recall your feelings around that time. How did it make you feel?
7. Think of a person or persons who encourages and supports you to stay in school. How would you describe how that person or those persons encourage and support you? What makes their support important and/or vital to your successes?

Closing Question

1. Have we missed anything in our discussion which you would like to add?

****Additional probing questions may be used to clarify any information relating to the questions asked of the participants.**

APPENDIX B

MODERATOR'S INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION PROMPTS SHARING CIRCLE #2

INTRODUCTION

Welcome back! Our first sharing circle was a great success. It was very powerful and informative. I was able to look through the transcripts and identify areas needing a little more attention. We will not be too long. I have six questions to cover. Lets get started.

Sharing Circle #2

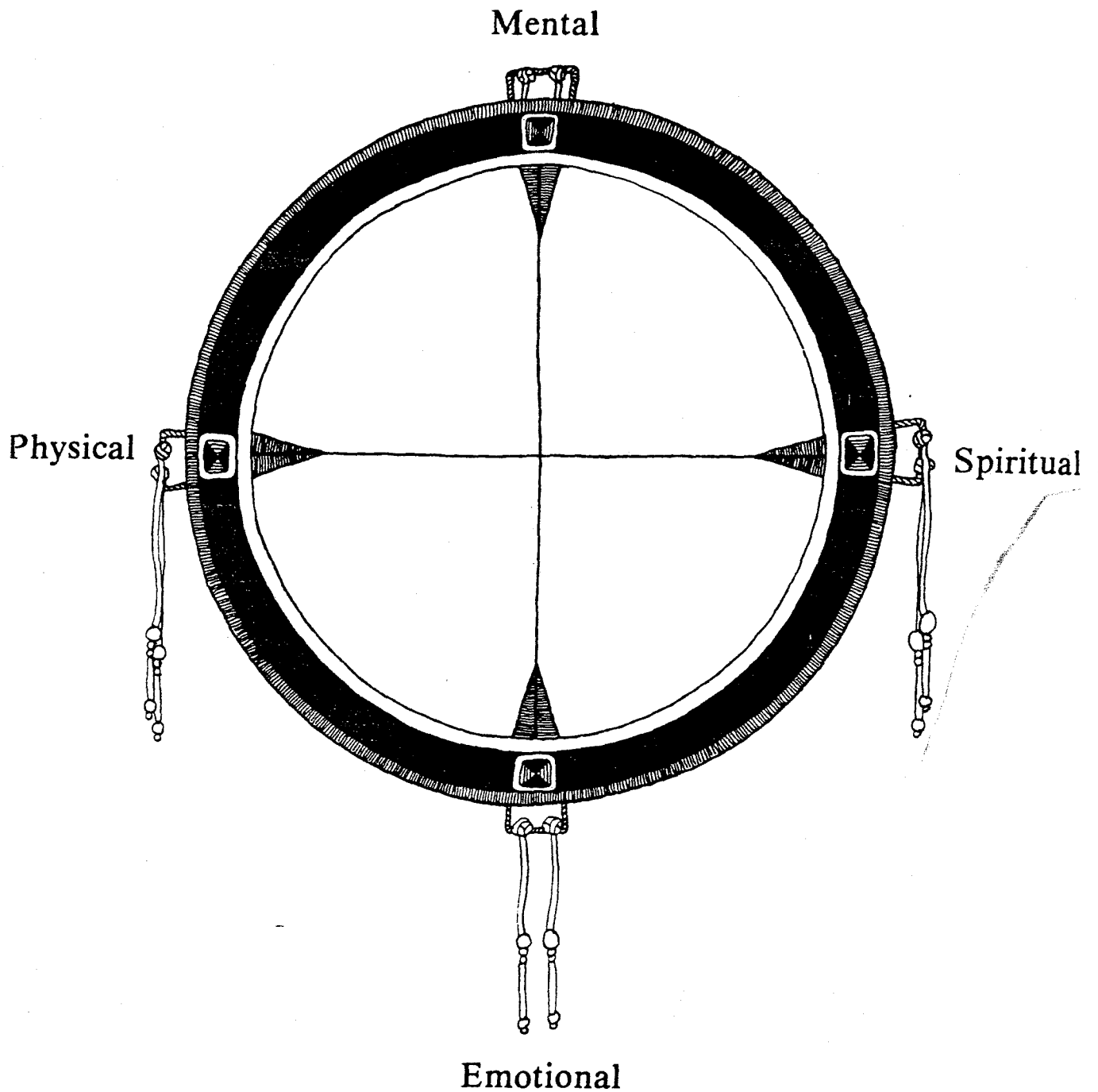
1. During your elementary, middle school or high school years, have you chosen or been placed in a remedial, alternate, or enriched program? When? What kind of program? For how long? Recall your feelings around that time. How did it make you feel?
2. Spirituality means more than church and prayer. It is a belief in something not physical. E.D. Feehan is a Catholic high school. You are of Aboriginal ancestry. Both groups hold spirituality as important in our lives. Describe how spirituality has helped you to be successful in school. Have teachers influenced you spiritually in your educational success? How?
3. I heard you talk about talents or gifts in the first circle. Elders talk about everyone possessing a gift or a talent in our lives. It is buried deep in our hearts. Some people struggle to find their gift, while others may never find it. Are you still searching for your gift? How has the search for the gift or the gift after you found it helped to you succeed in school?
4. We are a product of our environments. This means we are greatly effected by what is around us. E.D.Feehan has a specific environment. This means physical and non-physical. How has your school environment contributed to your success in school?
5. In a search for participants for this study the possible female participants outnumbered the males. As a result, we have five female participants involved in the study and no male representation. Is there a difference between Aboriginal male and female student success?

Closing Question

1. Have we missed anything in our discussion which you would like to add?

****Additional probing questions may be used to clarify any information relating to the questions asked of the participants.**

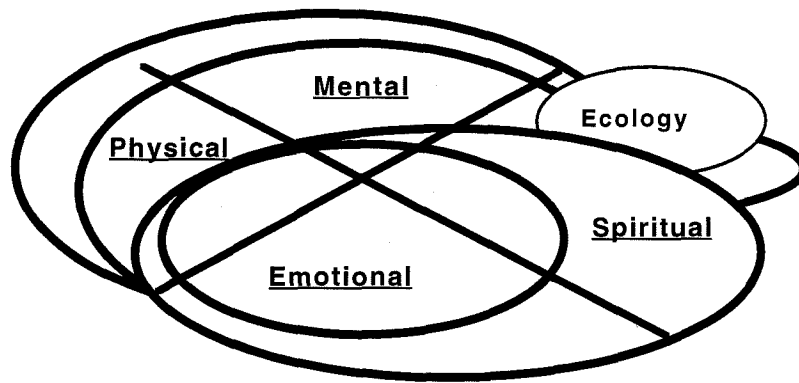
APPENDIX C
THE MEDICINE WHEEL



(Bopp et al., 1984, p. 12)

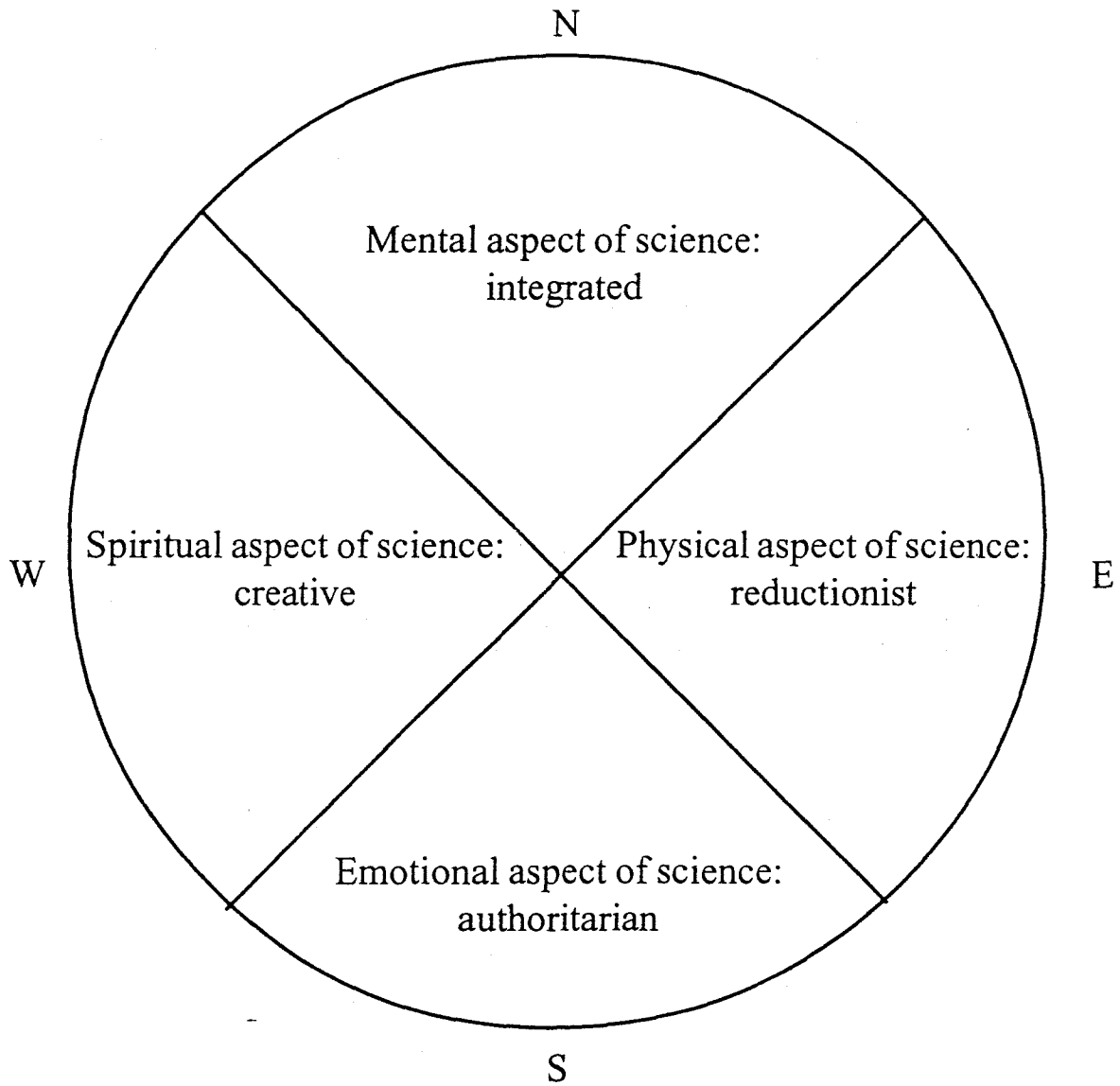
APPENDIX D

AN UNBALANCED MEDICINE WHEEL REPRESENTING ABORIGINAL EDUCATION



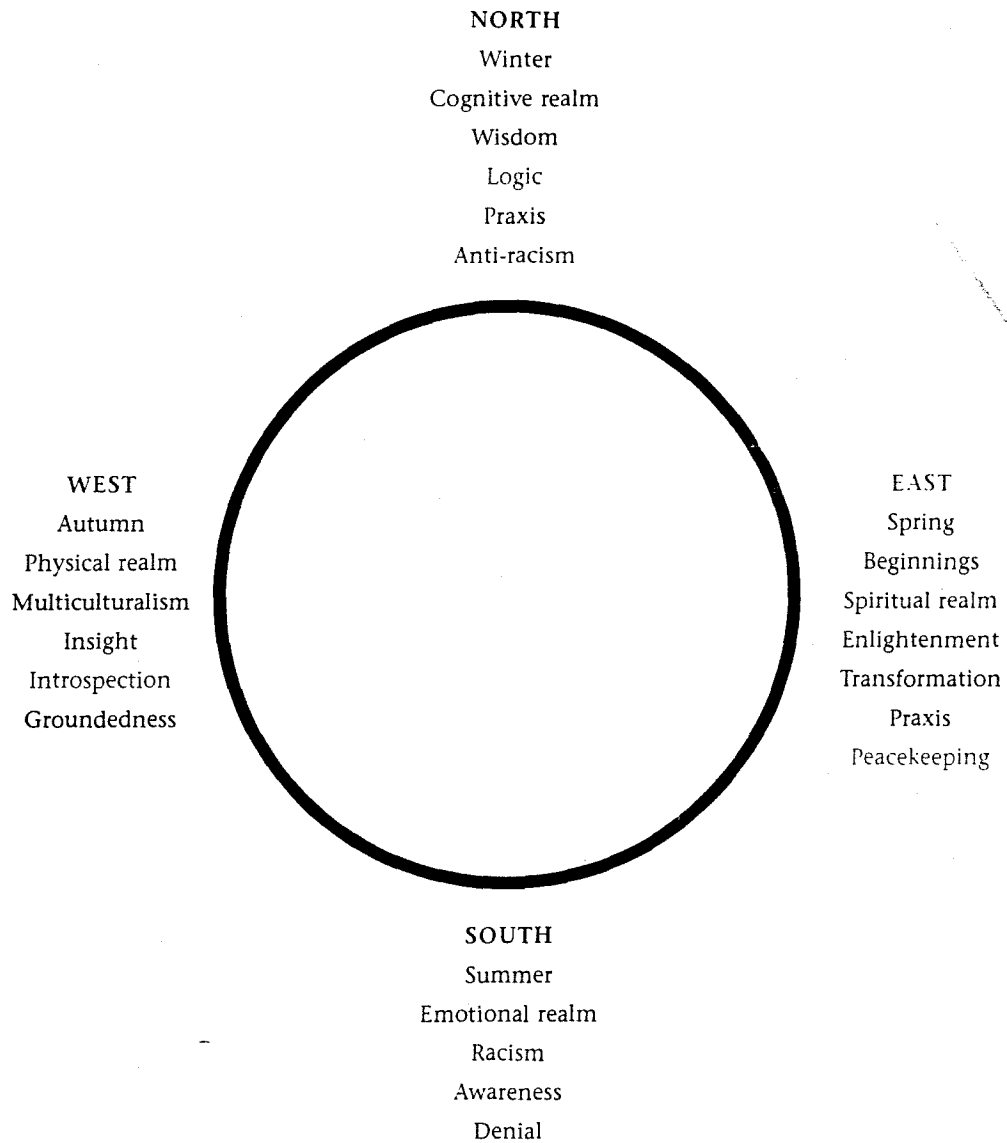
APPENDIX E

PLACING THE THINKING PROCESSES OF WESTERN SCIENCE INTO THE MEDICINE WHEEL



(Dyck, 1998, p. 96)

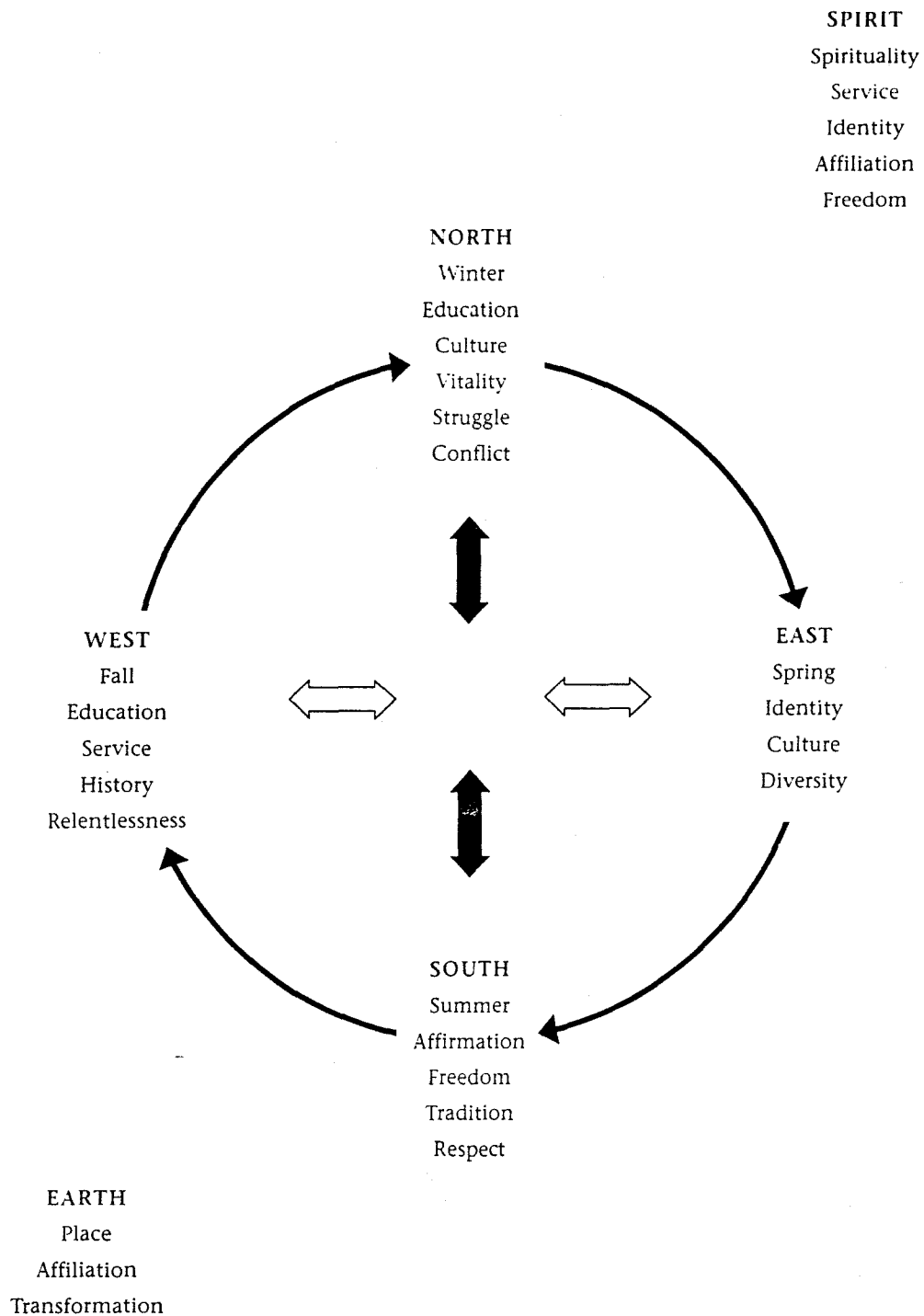
APPENDIX F
A MEDICINE WHEEL
ILLUSTRATING A PEACEKEEPING PEDAGOGY



(Calliou, 1995, p.54)

APPENDIX G

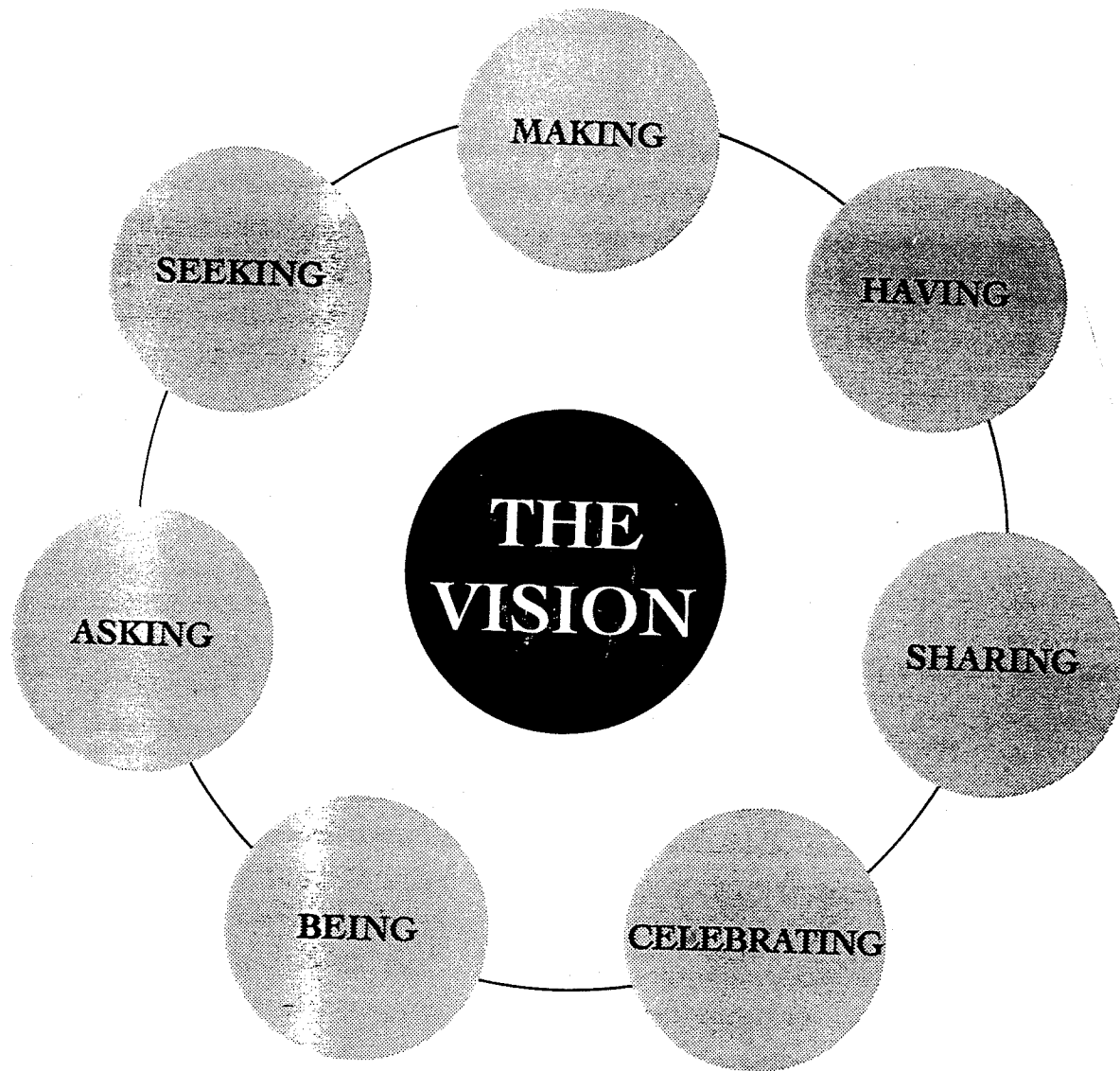
THE SIX DIRECTIONS IN REDEFINING INDIAN EDUCATION



(Hampton, 1995, p. 17)

APPENDIX H

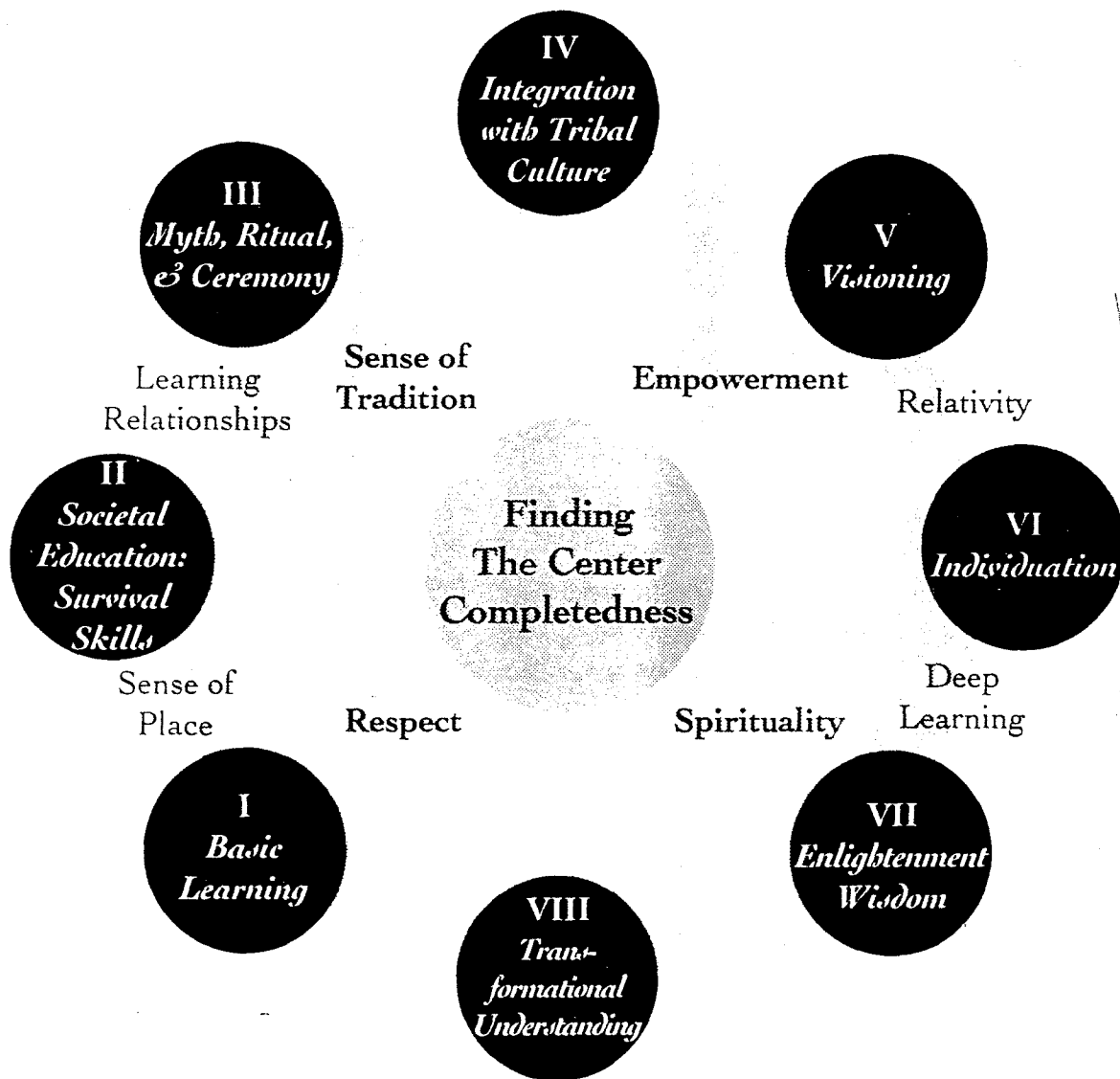
THE CONNECTED RINGS OF INDIGENOUS VISIONING



(Cajete, 1994, p.71)

APPENDIX I

THE INDIGENOUS STAGES OF DEVELOPMENTAL LEARNING



(Cajete, 1994, p. 210)

APPENDIX J

CONSENT FORM

1. Title of study: A Study of Factors Contributing to the Success of Aboriginal Students in an Inner City High School.

2. Researcher: Darryl Bazylak
College of Education
Department of Educational Foundations
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, SK.
E-mail: dbazylak@scs.sk.ca
Telephone: (306) 668-7204 (work)
(306) 955-6331 (home)

3. Purpose of the Study

You will be graduating in June 2002. I want to know what factors supported you in reaching grade twelve. I hope the factors you identify will help provide a more successful educational experience for other Aboriginal students.

4. Process

This study involves one individual interview and two sharing circles of 6-8 students. The individual meeting and sharing circle discussions will take place in a meeting room at E.D. Feehan Catholic High School.

During the individual meeting, I will describe the study in detail and answer any questions you may have regarding the process. I will also provide you with a description of my personal background.

In the first and second sharing circle, I will ask you questions and provide time for you to respond. The sharing circles will be tape recorded by a recording assistant so I can transfer the words to paper to be used later. You may refuse to answer individual questions or request that the tape recorder be turned off at any time. The first circle will last 90 to 120 minutes and the second circle will last 60-90 minutes.

A copy of the written transcript and data/transcript release form will be provided to you after the second sharing circle. We will review the transcripts together. You will have the opportunity to change your mind and add, alter, and delete information from the transcripts. Once you are satisfied it accurately reflects what you said in the sharing circle discussions, you will sign a release form and keep a copy of the release form and the transcripts.

5. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. If you withdraw, your data will be deleted from the study and destroyed.
6. I am committed to maintaining your confidentiality. I will not reveal any information that can be connected to you. A "fake" name will be used in the study to protect your identity.

In sharing circles, everyone is to respect the privacy of others and not talk about what was shared in the circle with any outsiders. Although this rule will be talked about with all the group members, I cannot guarantee that the other members will respect the confidentiality of each other.

7. The research was approved by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioral Sciences Research Ethics Board. I am aware of the guidelines and recommendations outlined by the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research involving Aboriginal peoples. If you or your parents have any questions you or your parents can contact the Office of Research Services (306) 966-4053, or my advisor.

My data collection advisor is:

Marie Battiste
Professor
Educational Foundations
College of Education
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, Sask.
Phone: (306) 966-7576
Fax: (306) 9667549
E-mail: marie.battiste@usask.ca

9. Feedback Procedures

You will have the opportunity make changes to the transcripts. As well, after formally concluding the sharing circles, you will be invited to remain and share refreshments and informal discussion. A final copy of the study will be given to you when it is finished.

Signature of Participant
(A copy of the consent form was provided to me.)

Date

Parent/ Guardian
(If participant is under 18 years old.)

Date

Researcher

Date

APPENDIX K

DATA/TRANSCRIPT RELEASE FORM

I, _____, have reviewed the complete transcript of focus group discussions in this study, and acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in the focus group discussions with Darryl Bazylak. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Darryl Bazylak to be used in the manner described in the consent form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

Participant

Date

Researcher

Date

APPENDIX L

ETHICS ON HUMAN EXPERIMENTATION: LETTER OF APPROVAL



COPY

UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN BEHAVIOURAL RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

<http://www.usask.ca/research/ethics.shtml>

NAME: M. Battiste (L. Stiffarm)
Educational Foundations
Indian and Northern Education Program – Adult and Continuing Education

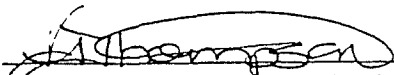
BSC#: 02-340

DATE: March 20, 2002

The Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the revisions to the Application for Ethics Approval for your study "A Study of Factors Contributing to the Success of Aboriginal Students in an Inner City High School" (02-340).

1. Your study has been APPROVED.
2. Any significant changes to your proposed study should be reported to the Chair for Committee consideration in advance of its implementation.
3. The term of this approval is for 5 years.
4. This approval is valid for five years on the condition that a status report form is submitted annually to the Chair of the Committee. This certificate will automatically be invalidated if a status report form is not received within one month of the anniversary date. Please refer to the website for further instructions: <http://www.usask.ca/research/ethics.shtml>

I wish you a successful and informative study.


Dr. Valerie Thompson, Chair
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

VT/bk

